

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

DR. JAMES HASSON



EDINBURGH
THE POSEIDON PRESS
34 Howard Place

Dedication from author.

To F. Knock Esq

✓
C

with the author's grateful Compliments

✓ Hardy

THE BANQUET OF
THE IMMORTALS





LES PLAISIRS DU BAL

by Antoine Watteau

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

by

DR. JAMES HASSON

With an Introduction by

CHARLES RICHARD CAMMELL

Associate Editor, *The Connoisseur*, 1935-40

and

TWENTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS: ELEVEN OF
WHICH ARE IN COLOUR



EDINBURGH

THE POSEIDON PRESS

34 Howard Place

MCMXLVIII

Printed in Great Britain at
The Westminster Press
411a Harrow Road
W.9

TO THE MEMORY OF
THOSE WHO WENT THROUGH LIFE
WITH A LYRE IN THEIR HANDS

My grateful thanks are due to the following for their kind help and advice: The librarians of our National Libraries, The Victoria and Albert Museum, and The British Museum; Major L. V. Atkinson, M.C.; Mr. H. C. Bainbridge; Mr. Cyril Bunt; and Mr. Theodore Nicholl.

JAMES HASSON



MARBLE BUST OF THE
SCULPTOR'S DAUGHTER

Anne-Ange

by Houdon

INTRODUCTION

By Charles Richard Cammell

WHEN a virtuoso of the rare and beautiful writes of those works of art which he has acquired for his delight, he does so with a very special enthusiasm and care for exactitude in detail. No point of historic or æsthetic interest is omitted; all that research can ascertain of the treasures collected is embodied in the descriptions thereof, and the finer shades of their spiritual appeal are discovered. Such a study is this by Dr. James Hasson, a man whose name is familiar wherever the fine arts are discussed, a connoisseur of discriminating taste, one who has gathered about him, in a setting of the most original beauty and charm, a truly wonderful collection of masterpieces, representing a wide range of period, school, and medium.

On all who have visited Dr. Hasson's island home the impression is profound and not to be effaced. Memory leads them by the hand, recalling them to the creeper-clad house—a panel-lined jewel-casket set in a scene of voluptuous beauty: Armida's fabled garden, found surprisingly in an English country scene: the lucid, rapid waters of the river Kennet flowing with murmurous falls beneath the Georgian windows, the golden trout rising to snatch unsuspecting flies under the willows that fringe the rose-gardens.

The sorcery of this water-girdled pleasaunce is enhanced within the house. Everywhere are the high achievements of ancient days, still fresh with the eternal youth that genius alone can impart to materials which were else inanimate.

Who reads this book will share the wonderment of every visitor; for the Lord of the Manor of Shenfield takes him by the hand and unlocks for him the secrets of his treasure. *The Banquet of the Immortals* is a book of absolute originality. It is not to be compared with other books on art and artists. It is unique; for it is at once a work of the highest scholarship and a romance—a Vision; a work which combines the historian's accuracy of detail, the connoisseur's subtle comprehension of æsthetic values, and the poet's imagination and instinct. Inspired by the masterpieces in his famous collection, Dr. Hasson, a Frenchman, has endowed English literature with an *épitome* of the Beautiful.

The author (as the world knows) is an eminent physician, and (as the art world knows) a distinguished connoisseur; but beyond that, he is a poet and a visionary. These three distinct elements, the scientific, the æsthetic, and the poetic, he has blended in this book in a curious way.

Of the Vision which is the soul of this book, the singularity is at once apparent.

INTRODUCTION

The whole work bears internal evidence of its visionary authenticity. By some spiritual alchemy Dr. Hasson has succeeded in entering the lives of the artists and craftsmen whose master-works adorn his home, not as a scholar only, but as a seer. That the long and laborious hours of historical research which he has devoted to his theme unlocked for him the door into past periods, there can be no doubt; but that, once they were unlocked, he passed that door in no mood of an historian is equally indubitable. Once the barrier between the two worlds was traversed, once the illusion of time was transcended, the author walked psychically, saw with the inner eye, heard with the ear spiritual. It is thus that poems are made, even the highest.

Friends of Dr. Hasson have asked him why it is that so many of his collected masterpieces, whether they be pictures or *bibelots* or illuminated manuscripts, are religious in spirit and subject.

He has answered simply that his taste and nothing else directed his choice; that he acquired always and only what he loved most.

But not Sacred Art only has made illustrious the collection at Shenfield. Its quiet chambers are the home of some of the loveliest works of those French eighteenth-century masters who, in a very special way, endowed the visible arts with the subtle essence of poetry. Such painters as Watteau, Boucher, Fragonard, Nattier; such sculptors as Clodion and Houdon, are seen there in the quintessence of their exquisite achievement.

To Nattier and Houdon there are no chapters devoted in this book. "I have written enough," replied the author to a query concerning their omission, and that of other famous artists whose genius is represented at Shenfield. His judgment was not at fault: the vision could not wisely have been prolonged; of every book, of every work of art, the whole is more important than the parts, be they never so interesting or excellent.

Yet of Nattier and of Houdon a word must be said. Of each of these masters Dr. Hasson possesses a *chef-d'œuvre*; of Nattier a large golden, jewel-encrusted double snuff-box, adorned with no less than fourteen miniature portraits of Louis XV, his Queen and his children, all by Nattier's own hand. This marvellous *bibelot* was the gift of Louis to George II of England, and after many adventures came into the possession of the exiled Empress Eugénie. Appropriately it is once again the property of a French connoisseur.

Houdon's contribution to Shenfield is the great sculptor's marble bust of his two-year-old daughter, Anne-Ange. When this charming child, angelic in name and face, died at the mature age of fifty-five, in 1843, the little gem of statuary passed to her nephew, Paul Perrin. It was in the Perrin-Houdon collection as late as 1914. Thereafter it disappeared till Dr. Hasson found it by a strange chance in a West of England country town. Professor Louis Réau, identified *l'enfant perdue*.*

The delicate modelling of the child's head is a fine example of Houdon's technical mastery; yet his technique is but the means to materialise the innate

* See article, *A Great French Sculptor of the Eighteenth Century: Jean-Antoine Houdon*: by Louis Réau, Member of the Académie des Beaux Arts; Professor at the Sorbonne: *The Connoisseur*, June 1948.

INTRODUCTION

poetic sense which is always at the core of his art. Into every character he portrayed he looked with the eye of a poet, to discover the spiritual quality of his subject. Every age of man was within his grasp: the angelic infancy of Anne-Ange; the youthful loveliness of Mademoiselle Servat; the maturity and wisdom of Benjamin Franklin.*

Of all Houdon's portraits perhaps none has impressed the writer of this preface so profoundly as the terracotta bust of Barnave in the Library of Grenoble. The sculptor's interpretation is an absolute illustration of that heroic and greatly gifted man's tragic history: truly

*"This was Barnave, the lord of Eloquence . . .
Attentive, look on him: what high disdain
Of all that little is,—or less than great:—
Of all mankind, for all were less than he!"*

It is indisputable that poetic feeling, imagination and atmosphere, the essential attributes of the Art of Poetry, are present in the finest examples of the sister Arts of Music, Painting and Sculpture. The question, often debated, still remains: how far does, and how far should, one art encroach upon another?

Lessing, in his celebrated treatise *Laocoon*, probed the matter deeply, and clearly defined the respective orbits of poetry and the plastic arts; but when definition is exhausted the mystery of Art abides. Bernini, who carved marble with the fluency of a painter's brush-work, assuredly confounded the sculptural and picturesque; yet his virtuosity could not mar his inspiration: *Apollo and Daphne* at the Borghese Villa is the proof.

So it has been with some of the loveliest poets—with Keats for example: in his Odes on *Psyche* and on *A Grecian Urn* he seems veritably to be painting with rhyme, metre and imagery. The pictures Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted are as much poems as his sonnets; his poetry reveals the painter in almost every verse. In Blake, too, the poet and painter met to create twin wonders—part-seen, part-heard, pictures and poems that hover eternally between the two worlds of earth and heaven. Richard Crashaw—"The Divine Crashaw"—excelled, we are told, in all the arts. Certainly his verses, so strangely beautiful, seem often to pass the borderline between poetry and music.

In Renaissance Italy the Arts not infrequently united to inspire a single genius. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti are extraordinary instances of universal creative energy; Salvator Rosa is another. Raphael's hundred sonnets have become legendary: hardly a handful remains to make us lament the more the loss of what was doubtless a garland of the rarest poetic blossoms.

Dr. Hasson has noted how "one branch of art is linked closely to its fellows", and has developed the theme with skill. Nowhere does his understanding of the higher æsthetic values appear more clearly than in his eulogies of Raphael, "the arbiter of taste", "the pinnacle of art-achievement". He has perceived and comprehended the absolute ascendancy of the Prince of Painters; and by

* Reproduced in *The Connoisseur*, June 1948. See previous note.

INTRODUCTION

that canon has come to value justly the achievements of such artists, each glorious in his measure, as Perugino, Francia, Lorenzo di Credi, Cima da Conegliano, the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew, of all of whom examples, characteristic as they are exquisite, are in his possession.

With what almost uncanny discernment has he written of these artists, their lives, their work! More than this, he has passed inward to the heart of each. As we read his chapters we seem to feel the heart-beats, as the master of long ago aspires, toils and achieves. He has discovered the soul of the tremendous Tintoretto, whose *Raising of Lazarus* is perhaps the prime glory of his entire collection, and he has entered the delicate spiritual shrine of Clodion, whose statuette of *Flora* is (it may be guessed) the most beloved of all his possessions—pagan though she is, and despite his general and genuine predilection for sacred themes.

Among his Sacred pictures Dr. Hasson has naturally his favourites, and one of these is Lorenzo di Credi's *Coronation of the Virgin*. This lovely painting once belonged to the poet Rogers. It is said that it hung opposite his bed during his last illness, when his long life of nearly ninety-three years was drawing to its close, and that his eyes were fixed upon its holy beauty ere he closed them in death; even as the young Raphael's dying gaze was fixed upon his own supreme creation, *The Transfiguration*.

There have been many to whom the poetry of Rogers has been a fountain of spiritual refreshment: Byron was one of these; Moore was another; the present writer is a third. In their hearts, the pensive beauty, the exquisite purity, the peculiar individuality of the poet, who could write,

*"There's such a charm in melancholy,
I would not, if I could, be gay";*

touched some mysterious chord of affinity. Habitually the poet's mood was one of quiet meditation upon Nature, or upon the human mind, as in these *Reflections*:

*"Man to the last is but a froward child;
So eager for the future, come what may,
And to the present so insensible!
Oh, if he could in all things as he would,
Years would as days and hours as moments be;
He would, so restless is his spirit here,
Give wings to Time, and wish his life away!"**

In the library at Shenfield, where precious mediæval manuscripts share the shelves with a rare gathering of richly bound volumes—eighteenth-century French poets and fabulists illustrated by Gravelot, Eisen, and other famous artists—may be found a little group of books of English poetry: they are "first editions" of Rogers, and among them is the poet's own copy of his *Epistle to a Friend*, 1798, with numerous revisions and verses added in his hand, many of which have not been published.

* See *Poems*, by Samuel Rogers: London 1834. Vol. I, pp. 194 & 210.

INTRODUCTION

We might well have found Rogers at this visionary festival of Immortals: a little old gentleman, quietly dressed. In his house overlooking St. James's Park he himself was once a famous host, and he was a connoisseur and collector of rare things. At Shenfield (and the presence of Di Credi's picture may draw him there o' nights) he would assuredly feel at home.

Of the importance of Art in the development of Man there can be no exaggeration. In *true* Art men emulate the Divine: the creative instinct is Man's divine heritage. Thus Art is in one sense boundless, in another circumscribed; in one sense original, in another imitative. It is boundless, in that all Nature, measureless in range and diversity, is its kingdom; circumscribed, in that, to fulfil its divinity, it must work always in those forms in which God has chosen to work. It is original, in that to each artist (poet, musician, sculptor, painter) his own purest, most lucid vision is the divine vision; it is imitative, in that the form in which the vision must be expressed, must conform to those natural forms in which God expresses the divine Idea. Hence the ancient Grecian designation of the Arts as *Imitation* was in the highest and deepest sense just and true. Hence, too, those vagaries of the arts, which in our own time have distorted and violated Nature, are a profanation of the Divine Principle in Nature. By distorting the *human* form, those that practice these degraded arts blaspheme against the *Image* of God in Man.

Rejecting the forms in which God has chosen to clothe his creations, they betray the divinity within themselves; failing to work with God, which is the artist's province and privilege, they fail to achieve true art, and forfeit the immortality which is Art's earthly and celestial guerdon.

In editing this book of Art I have had the assistance of my friend, Mr. Theodore Nicholl, the Welsh poet and author, whose fine sense of literary style, manifest in his own writings, has made him a valuable collaborator. I have been heedful to preserve the originality, the idiosyncrasies, of the author's style; for of every writer, and of every artist, the style is the signature, the hallmark of his quality. Dr. Hasson's style is richly figurative, luxuriant, and sentient of every play of the mind—and of the heart; for he writes emotionally and always *con amore*.

His mastery of the English vocabulary, and (which is much more difficult) of the inner sense and atmosphere of English words and phrases, must be remarked. The book, be it noted, is published as he wrote it, in every essential of structure and phraseology. The idiom is his idiom; the tableau is of his design and colouring—the canvas fashioned only a little to fit an English frame, but with its opulence of diction and passionate eloquence unadulterated.

Here is a work which abounds in felicitous phrases, coined cunningly to set off to advantage those figures of thought around which the Fable of the work is constructed, and whence it has inevitably evolved, rising ultimately to a magnificent *crescendo* of visionary oration. Even the simplest things can be sublimated by the alchemy of style, as where amid the silver and gilded cups upon his board, the author observes how the pewter flagons and tobies "introduced a note of democracy into an aristocracy of drinking vessels". A few

INTRODUCTION

paragraphs lower we find this profound reflection : "Man lives to learn ; but it would be equally true to say that Man *dies* to learn".

Such passages—the half-playful—the profound—are on every page. To select for citation were to forestall the collation of delicacies which the author has prepared for his readers. Writers of Introductions should be mindful of Landor's wise remark in that briefest of forewords, introducing his matchless *Hellenics* and *Heroic Idyls*: "Prefixing a preface is like keeping an invited friend at the hall-door, instead of conducting him at once into the house".* Rebuked by so glorious a pen, there must be no more tarrying. The door of Shenfield is open: *The Banquet of the Immortals* is laid ready for the guests.

* Preface to 1859 edition. See *The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor*; London, 1927-36: Vol. XIV: Poems II. p. 353.



CONTENTS

	Introduction by Charles Richard Cammell	<i>page</i> 11
	Contents	17
	List of Illustrations	19
	To Dr. James Hasson: Epistle by C. R. Cammell	21
Chapter I.	Shenfield	25
	II. The Assemblage	28
	III. The Guests	33
	IV. Perugino	43
	V. Di Credi	54
	VI. Francia	65
	VII. Conegliano; The Bellini; Tintoretto	79
	VIII. Jeanne D'Arc	94
	IX. The Master of St. Bartholomew's Altar	101
	X. Bernaert Van Orley	110
	XI. Raymond of Limoges	115
	XII. Isaac Sutton	122
	XIII. The Goldsmith of Nuremberg	127
	XIV. The Chalice of Knuthowna	137
	XV. Philippe de Champaigne	144
	XVI. Antoine Watteau	152
	XVII. François Boucher	163
	XVIII. Fragonard	174
	XIX. Clodion	183
	XX. Carl Fabergé	190
	XXI. Finale	201

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

COLOUR

Les Plaisirs du Bal <i>by Antoine Watteau</i>	Frontispiece ✓
The Coronation of the Virgin (Panel) <i>by Lorenzo di Credi</i>	page 58 ✓
St. Helen <i>by Cima da Conegliano</i>	78 ✓
The Raising of Lazarus <i>by Tintoretto</i>	87 ✓
The Nativity (Tryptich) <i>by the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew</i>	106 ✓
The Annunciation <i>by Bernaert van Orley</i>	111 ✓
The Presentation at the Temple <i>by Philippe de Champaigne</i>	145 ✓
Le Docteur <i>by Antoine Watteau</i>	156 ✓
Hymen and Love <i>by François Boucher</i>	165 ✓
The Prodigal Son <i>by Fragonard</i>	176 ✓
Jade Figure of Confucius <i>by Carl Fabergé</i>	195 ✓

BLACK AND WHITE

Marble Bust of the Sculptor's Daughter (Anne-Ange) <i>by Houdon</i>	9 ✓
One branch of the River Kennet as it flows through the Garden at Shenfield	24 ✓
St. Jerome and St. Sebastian (Altar-Piece) <i>by Perugino</i>	47 ✓
Madonna and Infant Christ (Panel for Shrine) <i>by Francesco Francia</i>	67 ✓
A Set of <i>Grisaille</i> Plates <i>by Pierre Raymond of Limoges</i>	118 ✓
Silver-Gilt Renaissance Salt <i>by Isaac Sutton</i>	123 ✓
A Pair of Silver-Gilt Globes, Terrestrial and Celestial, <i>by Andreas Bergmann of Nuremberg</i>	130 ✓
The Golden Chalice of Knuthowna	139 ✓
The "Flora" of Clodion (Statuette in Terracotta)	186 ✓
The Medieval Door of the old Chapel at Shenfield	200 ✓
The Summer-House on the site of the Chapel; showing part of the ancient Mill at Shenfield	205 ✓

TO DR. JAMES HASSON

OLD houses have strange dwellers. Voices talk
In half-heard whispers; unseen footsteps walk;
Faces peer forth from panels; dreams remain;
Dead lovers linger, of the lost hours fain:

Torn from Time's chronicle, immortal pages,
Illumined fragments fluttering down the ages.

Pictures have souls: each soul an emanation
Of his who laboured, rapt in adoration.
Still breathes the sculpture with the sculptor's breath:
Art chisels from the stone the dust of death.
The lifeless medium wakes to a new birth:
Genius brings Heaven's flame to light dull Earth.

So is it here in this enchanted place,
This shrine, this temple, where each faultless face
Defies the ruin of the ravenous years:
Art knows no stain of passion or of tears.
Immutable abides the captured gest;
The pure Idea, lull'd to perfect rest.

To you, whose love, whose wisdom, and whose taste
Your island-home with Beauty's spoils have graced,
What master-minds, what glorious Shades were drawn
Across the stream, along the rose-wrapp'd lawn,
Like misers to their unforgotten hoard,
Spread in profusion at your bounteous board!

Not all of Man as dust to dust returns:
A spark flies heavenward, an ember burns
Unquench'd in those fair forms the Spirit fires.
The God in Man creates: the heart desires;
The hand is guided by mysterious powers—
And Flora rises, wreathed with deathless flowers!

CHARLES RICHARD GAMMELL

1st June, 1948



ONE BRANCH OF THE RIVER KENNET AS IT FLOWS
THROUGH THE GARDEN AT SHENFIELD

CHAPTER I

SHENFIELD

How much the acquisition of Shenfield Mill had to do with the growth of that particular disease known as "art-collecting" from which I suffer, I do not know; for things which are interwoven with the past have a knack of merging and shading into each other, so that "the beginning" and "the end" become lost in the general effect—like a tapestry which, though it has taken years to weave, yet to the eye of the beholder becomes a moment's monument. Thus, to speculate upon cause and effect is like trying to unscramble a well-scrambled egg.

But this I *do* know about Shenfield—that as soon as I had seen the property I made up my mind that it was to change ownership. I remember that it was raining heavily on the day we went to see it. I say "we", for I was of course accompanied by Neith. This nick-name had been bestowed upon this representative of the Eternal Feminine of which Neith of Sais five thousand years ago said, "I am that which is, that which has been and that which shall be; and no mortal hand has ever raised the veil which covers me".

It was, as I have said, raining heavily and the kindly old lady who was showing us round must have thought me slightly mad; for, having seen less than half of the gardens, I turned to her and asked the price of the property. She pointed out that I had yet to see the house.

"Oh," said I, "of course, there's the house! But I am not thinking about the house. I want these beautiful grounds." She smiled and shook her head:

"The house goes with the grounds—"

"Naturally," I agreed, "but"—as who should say that was quite a secondary matter—"we can look at the house to-morrow."

That same evening the bargain was completed and Shenfield Mill became the home we had dreamed of for years—ever since I had started by "collecting" an old cottage. Here, then, was a genuine antique—a delightful Georgian house—set in the midst of a delightful garden, watered by three streams, complete with a derelict mill and a little building which was at one time a "chapel".

This gem of a place—this veritable shrine—cried aloud for beautiful things to adorn it. Surely it would have been a tragedy had I neglected the voice which whispered and re-echoed from the eloquent stillness of the old panelled walls, from the tangle of the ancient gardens and the hushed murmurings of the streams, that here were sleeping ideals of traditional taste and beauty only waiting to be awakened by the approach of sympathy and love. Need I say

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

that I not only heard that voice, but heeded it, allowing it to spur me on to what, for me, were mighty deeds in the vast arena of art collecting.

That urge was a tiny affair at first; but it grew in volume and imperious power the more I delved into the past history of the property of which by a special dispensation of Providence—or so I like to think—I had become the owner. Naturally, the unearthing of detail after detail, based upon ancient records or local mouth-to-mouth traditions, “got hold of me”, and my imagination soared as my information increased. I even admitted pure phantasy into my realm of meditation, the only test being—did the phantasy fit? If it did, I hung on to it; and down it went in my records of time, place and circumstance.

As the following pages are full enough of phantasy, I think I should here set down the simple and unalloyed story of historic fact, as a sure foundation of that shrine which formed the woof of so much of the stuff of which dreams are made.

The manor of Shenfield was entered in the great Domesday Survey as the property of the Comte d’Evreux before the county of that name was ceded to the realms of France in 1198. It was worth, in those days, 40s. a year; the mill, itself, being worth 10s. A hundred years, or more, later (in 1297-8), the Count’s successors were the monks of the great Abbey of Noyon in Normandy; and it is recorded that they leased the manor to one Albert de Whitchurch, who, in his turn, granted it to William de Englefield “with the multure of his men of Shenfield; the mill-acre in front thereof and another at Hussiebrigge, as well as an island called Bridge Eyot; a half-virgate of land then held by Bernard the Miller of Shenfield and the fisheries and waters thereunto belonging”.

In the second half of the thirteenth century there were two mills where the old mill now stands; one a fulling and the other a corn-mill. Both were held by Margery, the widow of another William Englefield. This Margery Englefield gave the mills to her son, John, who, in a moment of piety, granted them to the wealthy Abbey of Reading. Thus the mills became the perquisite of the Cellarer of that Abbey, who rented the fulling-mill to Bartholomew the Fuller. Towards the end of this century, the revenue of 5 marks at “Schenfued” was surrendered to Ela Longespye, Countess of Warwick, in part lieu of other lands in Staffordshire.

After the suppression of the monasteries, Reading Abbey among them, the mills at Shenfield passed to a certain Sir John Williams and, being in private hands, we hear no more of them until 1811, when a record tells us that they had become paper-mills and with the house adjoining were worth £600 a year. The mills remained paper-mills until they were burned out in 1877.

The ruins of the old mill-house are a constant reminder of a past, rich in tradition, and for me they provide many a lurking-place for the ghosts of bygone days. I stood one late evening on the mill-house bridge, when the gleam of dull moonlight was lost in the heavy foliage which overhangs the leat, and imagined shades peering forth from the adjacent ruins. I sensed uncanny

S H E N F I E L D

stirrings amongst the pendulous ivy and bushes which, in themselves, are ghostly and, therefore, fit hiding-places for such visitants.

Sauntering in the moonlit garden I saw the old house, materialising, grey-built and of monastic severity. Its walls of rough-hewn stone were thick and solid, with heavy quoins at the several corners and framing the deep-set windows: a typical house of the eleventh century; rough, strong-set upon its site and built to last, if the hand of Man should let it be at rest. As I looked, a heavy iron-hinged door of oak slowly opened and an old man in the habit and cowl of a Benedictine monk came out with leisurely step. He passed around the house and I saw that he was going towards a little steep-roofed chapel, possibly fifty yards away, which was surmounted by a small bell-turret above the stone-capped gable. Here he entered and a few minutes later the bell gave voice in a thin, plaintive yet insistent note, obviously calling the community of monks within and about the house to prayer. They came forth in a ragged procession from the house and hurried in from the fields; sombre figures in their monkish robes, with brown and weather-beaten faces, though here and there was the face of a pale visionary, or rubriciser—more at home in the scriptorium than in the fields. These were the denizens of the “cell”, thrown out from the great Norman Abbey of Noyon, across the waters in sunny France. The little gathering entered the chapel and presently the sound of men’s voices in prayer and chant came to me in the evening air.

It may be that one day the hidden foundations of that old house will come to light; but the fact that the ground whereon it stood is the very ground whereon I live to-day sanctifies that ground for me. For at least a century, day in and day out, the monks of Shenfield had sung here their matins and lauds, their vespers and compline. Is it possible that sound, in common with matter, cannot be destroyed, or dispersed, in terms of nothingness and is still *there*, and waiting for some yet-to-be-discovered human sense which is so finely tuned that it can call back from the greater silences the sounds that were?

CHAPTER II

THE ASSEMBLAGE

THE War of Wars had ceased; death no longer ruled the air, the land, the sea. Peace, or rather the War *for* Peace was rolling over the battlefield of the whole world, seeking to vanquish the lingering gloom and smoke with light, serenity and hope. All men hoped to breathe freely again, and fear was brushed from anxious faces as one might brush cobwebs from the corners and crevices of a beam—the simile of the cobweb being particularly apt in respect of my treasures; because long since they had crept, one by one, into the dark security of our strong-room, there to be left to brood (I surmise) upon the incomprehensible ways of Man, who had taxed his faculties to bring them into the world, had for centuries been meticulous in caring for them, and then had bundled them into the dark to remain comparatively neglected and forgotten.

Well, I felt I owed them something more than an apology for the idiot-action of men which had rendered their relegation to obscurity so necessary; something more than a mere reinstatement and renaissance to the light. They had been together—long in the uncomprehending dark. That they should come again into the comprehension of light was an occasion—veritably a great and momentous occasion.

What does one do with an occasion which has linked itself with events such as the lifting of the intolerable burden of a great war? For us it signalled the abandonment of restraint by the manifestation of a great joy; and abandonment and joy mean, if anything, the permeation of thought and action, by the very spirit of abandon. Why should it be otherwise with them?

We planned to bring them forth; and it was in the process of so doing that the concept of "The Great Feast" occurred to me. Shenfield is a spacious old house with many rooms, and our idea had been, originally, to grace those rooms in more general use with the pictures or articles of *virtue* most fitting to the environment. For example, the glorious *Bal Champêtre* of the immortal Watteau should hang in a niche in the boudoir, where it would receive all the light and distinction which its exquisite colouring demanded. But, as I say, it was the bringing-forth which caused the spirit of Dionysus to cry aloud "To the feast! To the feast!"

I had been seized, as one in a trance, with a vision of Pagan revel. I could have sworn that the goat-hoofed, leering figure of Pan had lurked for a moment in the shadows of the hall! I nearly dropped the picture I was carrying—a large *Presentation in the Temple*—in consequence.

THE ASSEMBLAGE

"What *are* you stopping for?" demanded my similarly burdened companion, bumping into my back. I leaned the canvas against the staircase. My air was probably one of finality and of spontaneous decision.

"No!" I cried. "It's all wrong! By Jove, it cannot—it shall not be!"

Neith stared, and gently rested the Gothic "primitive" she was carrying likewise, against the staircase. It is, of course, possible that I had translated my thoughts into attitude and gesture; for, after a scrutinising look, she said calmly:

"Aren't you well?"

"Well?" I almost shouted. "How can a man be well when we present to the Gods the complacency of clods!"

"Dear me; I cannot recollect having been called a clod before."

"Oh," I groaned, in agony of spirit that it should be necessary to explain what the Gods had done to me in a fleeting passage through my domain. "Oh, my love—my very dear and most beautiful of all . . ."

"The harem instinct at its best. One of a mob—"

I tore my hair, I mouthed words that strangled themselves in utterance! I raised impotent hands to Heaven! Oh, the agony of being a Latin in this England of rationalised manners and restrained utterance, to say nothing of the canniness of the practical Scot which looked at me out of the enquiring eyes. The harem instinct! . . .

"Be calm, my dear; be cool. Collect yourself. Please, please—on an occasion like this."

"Occasion like this!" Three little words; but the balm of Gilead to a soul in conflict: she knew that something had happened not only to the occasion but to the protagonist of that occasion—myself. I became calm, normal.

"We shall make a shrine within a shrine. You, yourself, did say, 'On this occasion'. The opportunity may never come again; for it has arisen as a spiritual aftermath of a great war."

"And, of course, we cannot expect another great war in order to provide just such another 'occasion'?"

"Exactly," I said, with fitting emphasis. "These, our 'children', shall not only come forth into the light, but they shall come as a brotherhood—a community of things beautiful; enshrined as one glorious whole in a single room, and not one shall be missing from this 'resurrection of the arts'."

"But," she said, "they have been together for years—in the dark it is true, but together."

"As you and I, . . . together in the dark and spared by an Almighty beneficence—a dark, soiled with the gross images of war. But the forthcoming to the light—you remember—the forthcoming to the light—the End?" She nodded and her eyes glistened. I waved my hand towards the *Coronation of the Virgin*. "This is a secondary bringing forth into the Light. Should these lovely things have eyes, as at times I feel they have—these Virgins, these Holy Infants, shall they not look to the light—to the Light of Lights and hymn their silent thanksgivings to the Most High . . . as you and I did . . . you remember?" She remembered.

Perhaps a little shamefaced at the seeping forth of a quite un-British emotion,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

we picked up our burdens and, I leading, strode into the dining-hall, which without discussion we both knew was destined to be the *sanctorum* of this commemoration.

This shrine, the dining-hall, opens from the entrance lounge. It is a long room; its ceiling not over-lofty, so that spaciousness is not dwarfed by the contrast of area and height; a fine room, panelled in sixteenth-century oak, with a wide hearth breaking the wall on the right as one enters. The fireplace is recessed, a stone mantelpiece surmounting it. In the centre of the room stands a Gothic refectory table of massive oak, darkened and dully gleaming with the polish of centuries: chairs complementary to the fine old table stand at either side.

A critical look round confirmed me in the opinion that the room was *right* for my purpose—the foregathering of my “beauties”; right, not only in its proportions and lighting, but as having an aura in which the wonders of the art of bygone centuries might come together, blend and *settle*, and by the word “settle” I mean that my treasures themselves should have satisfaction in their environment.

It was not long before the best of our pictures had come to their places on the walls—a rich repast for both eye and imagination. Over the wide fireplace, where in a wrought-iron fire-basket with andirons to match, burned logs of mixed oak, pine and beech which gave forth pungent scents, we placed the gem-like Renaissance framed panel of *Saint Helen*, by the great Venetian painter Cima da Conegliano. To the right, hard by the low flight of stairs which led directly up from the hall, we hung Perugino’s twin-panels of *St. Jerome and St. Sebastian*—twin glories of sacred art; not only rich in colouring but tenderly expressive in form.

To the left of the fireplace where, incidentally, a secret door had once been in the mellowed woodwork, we hung that joyous “feast” of dominant reds and blues—the precious *Madonna and Child* of Francesco Francia. On one side of our cherished mullioned window, set with leaded lights, hung a lovely *Annunciation* by that charming master Bernard Van Orley, and on the other side a gothic primitive—a picture of infinite possibilities concerning authorship. On the long wall we hung four imposing pictures—the *Martyrdom* of *St. Cecilia* by Jacopo del Sellajio, the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Lorenzo di Credi, the expansive and gloriously lifelike *Presentation in the Temple*, an outstanding work of Phillipe de Champaigne, and last, but not least, the magnificent *Raising of Lazarus* by the great Tintoretto.

As if bringing a votive offering to an altar, we carried in the silver-gilt “Salt”, or *Salarium*, made by Isaac Sutton, of the Guild of Goldsmiths of the City of London in the sixteenth century. It is laid down in records of olden time that the “great salt” shall be brought in by the chief boteler—butler in modern terminology—attended by his train of underlings, to be placed with ceremony in the very midst of the board; thus separating those who sat in state with the lord, or master, above the Salt, from the tenants, villains and lesser folk who, in their degrees and in their times, sat below the Salt.

THE ASSEMBLAGE

On the long refectory table we placed our Queen Anne silver dinner-service and its attendant series of candelabra and single candlesticks; the covers, dishes, knives, forks, spoons and other pieces—for we wished to express the idea of a great banquet; as I have hinted before—a *Feast of the Resuscitation* and the foundation thereof was to be the best we possessed. Thus did we burden the oaken chest and coffer by the walls with the rest of our treasures, not only historic in themselves, but historic with memories or ties with the past. In pride of place within the constitution of our hierarchy, as *pièces de résistance* we set the proud *morceaux* of our treasure house; an exquisite set of Limoges enamel plates depicting the Twelve Months by Pierre Raymond; the Golden Chalice of the Abbess of Knuthowna of Poland; the delightful and unique snuff-box of Maria Leczinska, one-time Queen of France; the famous Chudov Reliquary from the Tsar Nicholas I's collection; the Cross of the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg; and I must not forget two precious *souvenirs* of Marie Antoinette—a travelling tea-set, given to her by the Dauphin, and a superbly painted fan—a pretty toy indeed and a fitting conspirator in the coquetteries of a pretty woman; or, as a French poet might have said: "One quivering wing of a gorgeous butterfly new-lit upon the throne of France!" These two specimen pieces made a contrasting display of richness in gold and colour.

A side-table held a beautiful terra-cotta statuette by the great Clodion: it was the lifelike image in miniature of his young wife—Flora. Flora!—the flower-queen among women, and to the artist himself all that was lovely, either in womanhood or flower! Clodion fixed the dower of a sweet and tender beauty upon her face for ever; and not even an alien or unsympathetic environment could take anything from the beauty the artist had created in the inspiration of a great love.

In a corner we formed a display devoted to the masterpieces of the great goldsmith of Russia, Carl Fabergé. The *pièce de résistance* was his wonderful study of Confucius, into which, in a mood of daring achievement, the artist had infused the very principle of Life, giving to the image freedom of movement in head, hands and tongue.

In other parts of the house there were apartments full of the spirit of great painters and their work: Watteau, Boucher, Fragonard, Nattier and many others; but it is with the dining-room as the scene of the great banquet which afterwards took place that this narrative is chiefly concerned.

When all was done I looked round—we both looked round, receptive of, and responsive to the inwardness of beauty; and we became silently aware that the aura, and indeed the whole character of our neutral chamber was changing; nay, had changed! It had become a potential of positivity; its neutrality was submerged and its reflection was now full of purpose—a purpose that was knightly and insistent; thrusting, yet so discreet in its assuredness that nowhere was it to be discerned, whence came the imperative, dominant note of individuality—of distinctiveness. I whispered to my companion:

"What . . . what have we created? Can you feel it?"

"Yes," she whispered, as though she had come to the open door of a temple

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

and looked over many heads bowed in prayer. "It's uncanny. See! they have come to life! Beauty one can understand; but this is something—something more than the objectivity of beauty . . . some order of movement within silence and stillness or, is it *behind* silence and movement? These forms on canvas are but forms; yet ——" she paused from the sheer inadequacy of words to describe such feelings.

"There is another artist working on them," I whispered. "We cannot see Him, nor the wide sweep of His brush; but He is the artist who fuses all things beautiful, and His mission is to create of separate harmonies a super-harmony. His art is the composition of the parts of beauty into a body—conjunctive and complete. Think! . . . what is the first attribute of the living body?"

"Movement," she said at once. I did not speak for a moment. I felt as one might feel who has trembled on the verge of a great knowledge—so vast that it can but knock on the door of human comprehension and then pass on.

"Movement!" I murmured, more to myself than to her. "That—that is what we have seen. A shadow—a chimera; but—we can't have both been tuned in at one and the same moment to a mere hallucination . . .?"

"Of course not," she insisted. "I am a very ordinary human being; but even *I* feel—*know*—that there is some yet-to-be-discovered link between the exquisite, still work of the highest Art and the rhythm of movement . . . movement——"

It was well past our normal luncheon hour before all was done.

With the end of many visits to the strong room, we felt we had earned the right to feast our eyes on the materialisation of a dream—our dream; the creation of a shrine within a shrine. The sun was high and his light, not direct but radiant, wakened to life the warm colours of the old masters on the walls. It spun a halo around the golden chalice, whereof the gold is unalloyed. The silver glistened on the refectory table; the generous display of glass sparkled and, here and there, gave forth the flash of prisms; those delicate knick-knacks, the pieces of Fabergé, twinkled and shone, and the *bibelôts* clustered around Confucius—he of the jewelled eyes—threw tiny coruscations to our sweet Flora in terra-cotta.

It had been a labour of love; but love, the taskmaster, is exacting. We were both tired and hungry; so to lunch with a backward glance, at once burdened with regret to go and the promise of an early return.

CHAPTER III

THE GUESTS

A GLORIOUS June morning had been passed in a truly glorious manner. We were very late for lunch, and she whom I call my centre of gravity in the weighty matter of post-war feeding, had to hurry off in order to keep an appointment. I saw her from the premises and then strolled back, drawn as though by a magnet to the dining-hall. I entered from the lounge, paused, and allowed myself a slow-swinging gaze which became raptly admiring. Many faces looked out at me from mellowed canvases, serene, smiling, or merely—looking; yet I had the uneasy feeling at the back of my mind that their regards were concerted—inquisitive, if not definitely conspiratorial! They seemed to have got together and made me the cynosure of all eyes. Even the glass and silver appeared to have entered into that gentle conspiracy of query; for their sheen and sparkle came to me in some way quite beyond my powers to explain.

This attention I can only describe as *directed*—as if every canvas and piece in the room—each with expression after its kind—had been waiting and had unanimously turned to me with the unspoken query: What now? It was disconcerting; like being suddenly asked a leading question, and finding oneself neither in the position to give a proper answer nor privileged to demand notice thereof. My uneasy glance roved to the terra-cotta Flora. Her smile seemed to have taken on a curious enigmatic quality quite foreign to her ordinarily precious artlessness. Recollections of the Mona Lisa flashed into my mind, and as I stared at her in amazement her slightly inclined head very positively inclined further to the dimpled shoulder; the arch look deepened into open coquetry. I could have sworn her smiling lips moved, as she whispered the invitation which lies at the service of all women: Why not? It speaks well for my sense of the proprieties that I went cold all over, positively shuddered and then closed my eyes tightly to shut out the possible vision of an infuriated Clodion glaring at me out of the shadows. I blinked and looked her full in the face; but—Clodion must have been somewhere in the vicinity—the little wanton had swung back into her aura of smiling innocence as though to assure me that the blame, if blame there was, was all mine.

Frankly, I did not quite like this sort of thing; coming, too, on top of a really excellent lunch and a bottle of very fine old Pommard which I had had to drink myself, as I consider it on the heavy side for the opposite sex.

I looked again, carefully, around at my treasures. But they, unlike Flora, held

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

their ground; for their concerted expression of expectancy had, if anything, deepened. I stretched and yawned and, without thinking, murmured an apology. Then, I laughed outright . . . apologising to a galaxy of lovely inanimates! I reflected, sleepily, that I should be well advised not to say too much about it to Neith, and it would certainly be most indiscreet to mention the little incident of the terra-cotta Flora. There are, I remembered, occasions when it is best for a man to keep a guard upon his tongue.

I think I must have walked backwards and fallen into the depths of a high-backed Saxon chair; and, not being sufficiently interested to be deeply speculative about anything at the moment, probably went to sleep. At least, that is my personal view of the matter. How it came about that I suddenly emerged out of absolute blackness into a state which I might call "split" personality, I shall not attempt to explain. The fact remains that one part of me was somewhere in the room—a part of me which I remember, I did not like at all; for he, or it, looked at the other part of me derisively; that other part being in the high-backed Saxon chair in the inelegant attitude of complete abandonment to unconsciousness. From the next room a melodious and suave music ravished my ear: it was Trentinaglia's inspiring *Apparition*, which flowed like honey and milk to a soul entranced. The dream to come was being tuned up to perfection.

Silence . . . and then the twentieth century vanished! Each picture in the stately range of pictures shook slightly, as if it were a door that someone unseen had sought, prematurely, to open. Then they were stilled; but every face on every canvas stood out in three dimensions as clear-cut in outline and detail and as definite in depth as I am myself in normal existence. I knew that they were on the very verge, or unbridged gulf, of a great expectancy—a gulf which I had not the power to bridge; for I, like them, had neither true volition, nor power to withstand what I felt was the play of supernal forces.

A gleam of light flickered across the wax-polished panelling of the farther wall; the service-door opened and a man appeared holding a lighted taper, the flame of which he shielded with a cupped hand. He was old and grey-haired. In the sudden gloom of a strange darkness which now filled the room, I could not see the detail of his dress, save that black predominated—black breeches and black hose enclosing a thin shank.

He shuffled into the room, silent, gravely discreet and solemn as a man setting a solemn service afoot. His colourless old face was caressed by the cheerful light from the burning logs, as one after another he carefully lit the many candles which decked the furnishings. I noticed the spasmodic retreat of dusk as candle after candle chased the darkness into shadowed corners and flung its quota of light against the ceiling. Light gleamed again on canvas and lit up happy and serious faces alike; the steadiness of candlelight merging with the dancing light from the fire so that glass and silver and the gold of the Chalice of Knuthowna twinkled and shone in the magic of refraction as they could never have done in the calm, clear and steady light of day. The poetry of a Rembrandt interior was there, with the added attribute that my pictures had come to life!

THE GUESTS

The old man, whom I supposed to be a sort of seneschal, or butler, was poking his nose here and there over the table, shifting this a trifle and adjusting that, and every now and then shaking his unsteady old head in evident disapproval of some inadvertent solecism committed by uncomprehending humans of the twentieth century. The service-door opened and shut behind a number of hurrying men in a medley of habiliments which it is beyond me to describe. In the midst of the hubbub of the goings and comings, the table began to groan with the vast variety of foods rapidly accumulating upon it. Fish, flesh and fowl wafted their vapours to the ceiling. I noted, particularly, a gigantic sturgeon outvying all the other fish; and a peacock, of royal right, tail and all, on a dais in the centre of the table. Clearly, no one expected the table to stand the whole brunt of this attack; for all spare space on sideboard, waggon and side-table was pressed into service for pastries, fruits, and sweetmeats of many countries. At one end of the table was set a gigantic venison pasty, while at the other was a young roast sow with several delightful piglets—typical tantonies, so set out that one might imagine they were pulling at her dugs.

Here I might point out that our dining-hall is of a size adequate for its purpose, and such as would be found in an ordinary comfortable country house; yet never in the normal way could it have accommodated half the "guests" who later materialized out of the ether. Neither could our good, stout table have supported, groan as it might, a tithe of the good things piled upon it. . . . Yet crowded it was not; for by some form of magic common to dreams, wherein material objects incline to adjust themselves to the requirements of the dream, the room, the table and other furnishings lengthened, widened, but in some discreet manner which did not even in a remote degree disturb proportions or obtrude the idea of magnitude. Indeed, it was not till my waking hours returned that this anomaly occurred to me; and when it did, a survey of my noble dining-hall convinced me of the fact that, in the terms of my dream, it had shrunk, and shrunk badly.

I saw the old man, who had first entered, hold up a thin, white hand, and listen. Then he waved the hand and silence reigned; the servers were back against the walls like well-drilled soldiers, waiting for the attack to commence. I had seen no movement; matters were at pandemonium height one moment and dead silence ruled the next.

The cause was the advent of the cassock-clad figure of the Abbot of Noyon who came slowly down the stairs leading to the dining-hall. Not an eye among the servers was raised to him; but the old seneschal stood at the foot of the stairs with one hand extended in a gesture at once of courtesy and respect. My eye, of course, followed him. The Abbot, who wore the cape and skull cap of his status in the hierarchy of the Church, smiled as he completed his descent and extended a hand which the old attendant kissed, while he raised the other over the bowed head in blessing. The face of his lordship was of the type one might look for in a Norman—lengthened in features and serious; yet not so serious but that one could imagine the light of kindness and a measure

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

of dignified geniality breaking through the innate hauteur of one accustomed to having his least wish obeyed immediately.

The old seneschal conducted him to a wide armchair by the fireplace. Neither spoke; for words seemed hardly necessary in a mutual knowledge and understanding—the outcome of being together, I imagined, for many years. Before the Abbot sat down he stood up to his full height and murmured a prayer under his breath. I saw his thin lips move and his grey-hued face light up with inward fire, but caught no words. Then he rubbed his hands, sighed, and in sighing seemed, metaphorically, to throw off his clerical habiliments; for he smiled, widely.

I noted that in him, too, was that same air of expectancy which had held the room in growing trance ever since the gathering together of our treasures had been accomplished. He looked slowly round the walls. His gaze shifted from picture to picture and then came back to the Cima over the mantelpiece. He put up a thin, white hand to deflect the dancing light from the flames of the fire, and I noticed the exquisite delicacy of the lace tippet which fell back from his wrist as he did so. His eye was fixed in the deepest concentration, and I felt my sensitive soul tremble in apprehension; what if he were an art critic; a critic, vested in the narrow prejudices of his time and calling, and about to damn my choice—my children—my very family? for truly these things to me were home, family, almost life itself. As his interest grew he rose from his chair; took a few steps backwards, his head on one side; then, with a forward step, corrected the distance. Obviously, the sacred subject pleased him.

The Abbot came nearer and seemed to peer into the latent shadows of the picture. Reverently, he took from the breast of his cassock a kerchief of finest linen, and with grace in every movement lightly brushed a corner of the panel, where it is possible some particle of dust might have lain.

Then once more he sat down; but with an eye still on the Cima. The old seneschal shuffled rapidly towards the far end of the room and, standing with a respectful air by the *Martyrdom of St. Cecilia*, raised his eyes—to welcome a figure which to my astonished gaze was coming *through* the picture itself. How all the deep tones of the painting could emerge and cloud and cream like the surface of a mountain lake in some down-swooping current of air, and then clear and reveal a human being immaculately clad in the fashion of his time, is beyond describing. There is no phenomenon in Life from which to draw parallel; yet there, as if standing on a platform, or ledge, stood the famous Jacopo del Sellaio himself, debonair and smiling. He looked down from his height on the seneschal, who had his left hand raised to assist him, and inclined his head with a slight shake and an independent shrug of the shoulder. No steps were visible; but his descent was, nevertheless, by steps, as the old man called out his name which drew from the seated Abbot a nod of welcome and a waved invitation of the hand to his presence.

Before each of the pictures did the old seneschal pay this tribute to the “master” called forth. Sometimes these figures appeared mysteriously, through the painting; but sometimes the picture, itself, swung back as though it were

THE GUESTS

serving the double purpose of door and canvas; but in no case did the old retainer fail to give the name, or title, of him who appeared. The room began to fill and move with figures. Then it was that our friend, the seneschal, came to hover between the stairs and the lounge; for leisurely figures in much variety of costume were coming down the stairs and by the corridors, and approaching through the lounge where the subdued light not only "distanced" its occupants but, in effect, reduced them almost to silhouettes . . . or was I gazing at shadow-shapes upon the wall?

How the old man kept pace with the many entrances I do not know; but never an appearance, or a correct name, did he miss. "Signor Lorenzo di Credi; Mr. Isaac Sutton; Signor Pietro Vanucci il Perugino; Father Stephan of Czernovitz; Signor Cima da Conegliano; Signor Jacopo Robusti il Tintoretto"; and so forth—name after name in his clear, sweet tones, more like a bell than a human voice, until I had lost count of the number of my guests. I seemed to be looking on a garden, where the hard core of brown earth is being rapidly covered with flowers, each having, as it were, an appointed place in the scheme of the garden and leisurely proceeding thither with nod and smile and, incidentally, taking not the slightest notice of the "gardener" who was still lying back in his chair—acutely conscious of his bad manners, but quite unable to do anything about it.

It seemed to me that the periods of many centuries were, sartorially, represented; from the swaggering, loose-flowing velvets of the Florentines and the elaborate satins and brocades of the eighteenth century down to the simple brown serge of the Master of St. Bartholomew, with a plain circlet of corded flax knotted about his waist and the lirripoop hood hanging down his back. It was well the Abbot was seated—seated, indeed, as one holding princely court—for so many dropped on reverent knee and kissed his ring that there seemed no end to homage; and to each was accorded a kindly word and a gracious blessing. Little groups had begun to form in front of several pictures and animated discussions broke out.

Most of my "guests" I was able to recognise, if not before, at least confidently after their illustrious names had been called out by the old retainer. I had read their lives with great interest and had sought for characteristics which might be associated with their work as artists, and so give me that intimacy, or insight into their personalities, which would increase my understanding of the works they had left along the trail of Art through the centuries.

I remember that I was attracted by the appearance of a man who entered from the French windows of the drawing-room. He was attired in the rich dress of an Italian gentleman of the fifteenth century when it was the custom for men to bedeck themselves, after the manner of peacocks, in many colours and fine feathers and thereby seek to outvie the apparel of the women of their time. Elegance and richness were high notes in the habiliments of this person; but he, himself, contributed little to his magnificence, for he was small of stature and clearly of a retiring disposition. He had no good looks, but appeared to have the sensitiveness of a poet-recluse, or a musician given to the writing

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

of strange music composed for the next world rather than for this. Yet I recognised that he was neither a poet nor a musician, but a painter and a goldsmith of renown in his days on earth—Francesco Raibolini of Bologna. Though aloof and unobtrusive among this impressive throng, he slid into a chair beside the voluble Perugino, with a furtive nod here and there and a scarcely audible “*benito*”. I reflected that his choice in sitting close to Perugino was a good one; for if there should be need of a screen, the expansive personality and inexhaustible flow of words from Perugino would provide it.

Then, after stately descent down my wide and easy stairs, those side-stairs which led into the dining-hall, there entered a man who immediately drew many eyes towards him, particularly the eyes of those artists who in earlier centuries had sought to clothe themselves in the heights of fashion . . . the immortal Antoine Watteau! Watteau—the creator of a vogue and a master of poetry in colour! Watteau, in all the pale glory of silk and satin knee-breeches and stockings, the very shoes covering his dandy feet trimmed with silver buckles inset with precious stones. He, of course, had a good deal to swagger about; and he was disinterestedly aware that his skin had the lustrous pallor of pale cream and his smile the property of a gift. Was he not the moon of painters in the artificial heavens which overhung the pleasure-loving society of the French Court of the eighteenth century?—the most luxurious, resplendent, witty, sophisticated court of all the countries of the world! He paused on the last stair, cast a look of definite appreciation around the room and nodded as if well-pleased in anticipation. Then he caught sight of his own pictures and, with a delicate lace handkerchief in his hand, made a delightfully graceful, waving gesture of recognition.

“My picture!” he exclaimed: an exclamation which immediately focussed all eyes on the canvas itself. “What a *bouleversement* this one made at Court—throughout Paris—throughout France!”

“Nay,” interposed a friendly voice behind him, “throughout the world; for surely there is only one Antoine Watteau.”

Watteau flashed round, and his slight frown melted in that rhapsodic way given only to Frenchmen when someone or something he loves floods the outward vision. He drew in a breath of sheer delight.

“Ah, Clodion, my friend! My friend! This is joy on joy to a surfeit!” They proceeded to hug and clasp each other, and then Watteau held Clodion at arm’s length and looked at him. “And that soul of your soul—the fair Flora?” Here, definitely, I remember retiring into a background of my own contriving.

At that moment I heard the seneschal announce: “Monsieur Philippe de Champagne”, and saw a man enter, tall and stately; with a high forehead and waving chestnut hair thick about his shoulders; a well-trimmed beard, and an air so picturesque that one would have dubbed him artist at a first glance and painter at the second. He might have been a well-preserved fifty in years; but age had little to do with his air of authority. He had been a most popular painter of portraits in the seventeenth century, and had painted the all-powerful Richelieu more than once.

THE GUESTS

So far, I may inadvertently have conveyed the impression that all my "guests", save Clodion, were painters; but such indeed was far from being the case. For example, I had noticed the entrance of Pierre Raymond, a stout Frenchman clad as a provincial townsman of his period. Perhaps in the difficult art of enamelling, Pierre Raymond of Limoges possessed a standing in his art equal to that held by Perugino among the painters of Perugia.

The high, clear and sweetly mellowed voice of the old seneschal rang out in a sudden switch from the staircase to the drawing-room, whence I saw three figures emerging—two together, indeed arm-in-arm, and the third behind. "Monsieur François Boucher; Monsieur Honoré Fragonard; Mynheer Bernard van Orley!"

There was no mistaking François Boucher, the dandy of dandies in his time—a time renowned for its aristocrats in matters sartorial—*du monde et de la mode*. With his magnificently curled wig and his jacket of the finest satin, edged with deep lace cuffs of complementary design screening the hands of a veritable master of his art, one could well imagine his word being law in matters outside the world of painting which he knew so well. He carried a long, gold-mounted and tasselled ebony walking-stick and held the inevitable quizzing glasses, or lorgnettes, before him with an air which, despite his smile, was not altogether free from the supercilious. Boucher, the Magnificent—the incomparable!

Fragonard, by comparison, looked a son of the soil, as it is possible, in terms of ancestry, he was. They said of him that he brought the sun and the Bacchic spirit of mirth and gaiety from his sunny Provence, to say nothing of the warm temperament of his Italian forebears; which attributes made so great a contrast with the tragic, yet spiritualising melancholy of Watteau.

Of Bernard van Orley I knew little, except as a painter of note in the fifteenth century, a contemporary of Gerard David and hence, of course, steeped in the Flemish tradition. His *Annunciation* hung on the left side of my window. I saw him look at it and then take a studied glance round the walls and to my happiness, for he was a great man in his day—caught his nod of approval, either as a salutation to his little picture or to the goodly company surrounding it.

The space around the Abbot and the fireplace had thinned when I noticed the "secret door" in the oak panelling open. A hairy face looked out and surveyed the gorgeous assembly with a mixed expression of suspicion and disapproval. The Abbot, too, perceived this apparition and with befitting dignity, waved an invitation to enter; thereupon a monkish figure emerged. It did not look particularly clean in its colour-flown cassock which was neither yellow nor brown, nor grey, but a mixture of all three; while the long and straggling beard of greying brown made a curious contrast with the tonsure of the shaven priest. He straightened up and looked around, almost defiantly.

"I am Brother Heinrich of Reichnau," he announced, in harsh and unfriendly German. "Why am I here, my good lord Abbot of Noyon, whose name was revered in the days of the great rivalries between our Monastery and St. Gall? Are we not bidden to a rout, or like assemblage of the ungodly?" He

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

paused; his fierce, eagle-eyes roved and the beads of his rosary rattled through his fingers.

"Nay, good Brother Heinrich," murmured the Abbot, rising and going with stately tread and kindly outstretched hands to the uncouth figure standing by the open door with feet apart, braced to an imaginary attack, maybe of devils. "You are bidden to a gathering of such as are, if I know their kind, men after your own bold heart."

"So?" muttered the German monk, still with suspicion in eyes that followed the movements of the assembly anxiously. "Nay, have they not the feathers of the peacock, which Hell employeth to hide the habiliments of souls in torment?" The Abbot paused in front of him and regarded him contemplatively. Then he said:

"Aha, the poor peacock, having the voice of the damned yet clothed in all the colours of heaven! Hast never thought, good Brother, that had the proud peacock the voice of the nightingale hidden beneath his gorgeous plumage, men might have paused in their blindness and their littleness of hearing and said, one to another: Surely this is perfection, and is not perfection God?"

"I had not thus considered the matter, my lord Abbot. But——"

His eye roved over the gathering and brightened. "The lesson is: Be not over hasty in judgment from colours and array of beauty". The monk made the sign of the cross, "Yet, Father, all my life have I dealt in these matters."

"Then, my son, widen the vision of that discerning eye; for there are colours and array and forms and flow of beauty within as well as without. There is the common ground where man meets man and knows him; even as there is the common ground where soul meets soul and knows God. Come; you shall sit at my side and be with us at table, for in the domain of beauty all men are equal."

So saying, the good Abbot took Brother Heinrich by the hand and led him to the top of the table. Then ensued bustle and laughter as men manœuvred for places so that friend might be near friend.

"Ah, Di Credi!" cried a handsome, swaggering gentleman still in his early thirties.

"Pietro Vanucci!" rejoined the one so addressed, as he thrust his way through the throng to the middle of the table where his friend was sitting on two chairs, with laughter repulsing sly manœuvres to dispossess him. The two young Italians immediately engaged in gay reminiscence. Then they became conscious of a sudden hush fallen on the assembly. They looked up and saw the Abbot smiling at them with his hand raised in the first gesture of his Latin grace. They subsided and rose at once. The Abbot spoke the solemn grace of ascription to God of the benefits of fish, fowl and flesh for the sustenance and strengthening of the body as the temple of the soul. The servers, at a wave of the hand from the old sensechal, dashed into action and very soon the many guests were making free of as goodly a fare as ever they had seen in their own particular periods—or, at least, that was the inward reflection which I distinctly remember

THE GUESTS

making. In the meantime the irrepressible Pietro tackled his friend Di Credi and, with Italian geniality, roped his neighbours into their field of reminiscence.

"Of course you know me," he announced, familiarly. "I am Pietro Vanucci. This is my friend Di Credi; and that fellow over there," motioning to a quietly-smiling gentleman a little distance away on the opposite side of the table, "is another friend of mine, Francesco Francia—he of the bibulous aspect. . . . Am I right, Francesco?"

"Were you ever wrong!" insinuated Francia, checking the too-liberal hand of a server pouring wine into an over-sized goblet before him. "I suppose," he added, looking round with a twinkle in his eye towards Perugino, "my friend here has already introduced himself as *the* painter of Perugia?"

"And by Perugia he means all Italy," laughed Di Credi.

"The faith of an artist in himself is a fundamental of all art," pronounced Vanucci, sententiously; setting both hands on the table and gazing down with rapt interest upon a delicate *mélange* of shell-fish just set before him, and moving his head appreciatively from side to side as though inbreathing sweet odours from the East.

The dinner was well started when there entered two sombre figures. They were bowed in by the seneschal, who called aloud their names: "Monsieur Carl Fabergé and—" (he bent courteously towards a monkish figure, who whispered in his ear) "—a worthy Brother from the Chudov Monastery!" Doubtless, I thought, this man would not be of my "guests" unless I had among my possessions something from his hands. The other Russian, Carl Fabergé, I recognised at once as Court Jeweller to the last two Czars of Russia. His name was one with which to conjure in that sphere of art where the artist deals with the rarer types of jewellery. As these two entered I noticed that Philippe de Champaigne had pulled towards him the Sutton Salt, not knowing that Sutton was regarding him with doubtful eye. De Champaigne turned the masterpicce round and round in earnest study and appreciation of the relief; then he peered into the interior, noted the contents, for a moment looked perplexed and then with a frown, rose and turned to the Abbot.

"My lord Abbot," he said, and a hush fell on the assembly. The Abbot looked up and smiled, encouragingly. "My lord," continued the painter: "between your lordship and my unworthy self stands this remarkable piece of work. Such delicate relief I have rarely seen. The artist must, indeed, have been a truly great man. But, my lord . . . the contents . . . the barrier which it imposes . . . among artists! My lord, I, Philippe de Champaigne—a gentleman of France and the intimate friend of great Frenchmen—I am set *below* the Salt! Though, indeed, I am in good company." He waved a graceful hand to Watteau and other dandies on his left. "My lord, I do but draw your gracious attention to this oversight in the otherwise perfect service of a perfect entertainment." There were a number of nods and encouraging smiles from those made aware of the fact that they, too, were *below* the Salt, as De Champaigne sat down. Up rose the Abbot and looked proudly round upon the diners:

"Messires," he said, "an oversight, of course, but," here a twinkle came

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

into his eye, "I would remind you that you yourselves in the happy anxiety for friend to be close to friend, did sit at odds—anywhere. And that is as it should be. No distinctions are carried over by us who pass on. The standard is different; and indeed oft incomprehensible to those who on earth had believed themselves worthy to enter into high places in the Hereafter." He looked round and smiled, genially. "If the salt has lost its significance for us it shall, none the less, never lose the savour God gave to it. Is it your wish, my friends, that the salt shall be removed?" At this Isaac heaved to his feet; "heaved" describes his rising; for he was a ponderous man, of good colour and typical of the prosperous citizen of London of his day.

"Nay, nay, my lord Abbot. I do protest. The 'great salt' is mine: my labour, my craft, my love expressed in art. This noble board would lose some of its magnificence if ——" Watteau rose to his feet and with his lorgnette coolly surveyed the good tradesman of London.

"Did you, my good master, make and put therein the salt?" The goldsmith stared and his full, round face reddened.

"Nay, Sir, salt is made of the Lord God."

"Good, my master. The Lord God has put his salt in every corner of the earth and in every drop of the ocean even unto the spindrift thereof, and the savour of the salt turns alike on the tongues of prince and peasant. Who has made this salt a barrier between man and man when that salt of the earth, the Grace of God, falleth upon rich and poor alike? Who but man himself? Therefore, my lord Abbot, I pray you let the "great salt" be emptied of its salt and set the golden bowl at the elbow of the stout man of London, whose work shall live when the names of lords and princes are forgotten!"

Watteau sat down amid loud and unanimous applause; and it was the old seneschal, himself, with an obvious look of disapproval, who took the "great salt" away, handed it to a servitor, and, a few moments later, set it carefully beside the now-smiling goldsmith.

CHAPTER IV

PERUGINO

MY memories of the actual banquet are of the vaguest. I can recall nothing distinctly until I emerged from a species of coma, bred of the chaos of sounds and sights, to find the feast ended. Glass and flagon remained, and the delicate bouquet of vintage wine continued to perfume the hall. I remember seeing that inert *me* in the big chair twitch his nostrils and slightly lift an in-tucked chin; so there would seem to be no doubt about the bouquet. The Russians and our weighty friend Isaac Sutton were drinking ale from heavy pewter flagons of ancient design and from olden-time *tobies*, which, I observed, introduced a note of democracy into an aristocracy of drinking vessels. The Abbot seemed to content himself with *mead*. I noticed that there were several empty places at the table and I knew that grace had been duly said. Those vacating their seats had gone to gaze upon the "exhibits", each carrying his flagon in his hand; which suggested to me that there are planes other than that of Earth whereon men in the matter of wine prefer not to leave too much to chance. Watteau, for instance, was standing balancing himself on the balls of his feet, with his precious lorgnette held, delicately, before his eyes, and apostrophising his two pictures, *Le Bal* and *Le Docteur*. Then after a sweeping bow, he raised his flagon, murmured something in passionate French, and drank long and deeply to his own "masterpieces".

My lord Abbot rose, a tall and stately figure at the top of the table to which all eyes were directed. He held up a thin white hand for silence—a gesture apt and fitting in one used to command:

"My friends! You have been here bidden to a 'gathering-in'—a forthcoming from the shadows into the light and substance; from the sleep of twilight—that Ragnarok of the Northern gods, in which we dwell—to an awakening; an *appearance* of the resurgent, earthly body, while yet it awaits the Day of the Rising and the Risen."

The good man crossed himself and for a moment, with fingers interlocked, stood as though in an attitude of thought. Then he roused himself, shook off what might have been a thought alien to his company, and proceeded: "You will say that this disturbing of your tranquillity has a purpose, as indeed it has—and, too, a cause. The cause is of that indefinable essence to which even Death itself can set neither confine nor limit; for it reaches across the steep chasm between Life, earth-manacled, and Life, heaven-free, . . . that essence we call affinity. Love hath a thousand facets; yet it is but a single star which sparkles with prismic fire and glory—a very attribute of Light—like that Star in the East

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

which hung in the world of an unpeopled firmament—the Star of guidance, opportunity and grace.

“Man lives to learn; but it would be equally true to say that Man *dies* to learn, and each of us knows how true that is. Love on earth may be timorous and vacillant; but in the Hereafter it is confirmed and it is as a light that burneth for ever in the darkness.

“I have said that there is a cause and a purpose in our foregathering. The cause, I would say, is clear to us all. Affinity has somehow arisen between a man of earth and men formerly of earth but now earth-freed. It is ours to give expression to that affinity.

“It will not have taken you long, my friends, to have discovered that there is not one here but is directly connected with one or other of these treasures.” He made a sweeping gesture with his right hand which comprehended the whole room. “My knowledge of such things is very limited; for in my days on earth I was vitally a man of action. I loved the land and what the land gave. I loved the creation of engines and such strange things which labour in themselves in the service of Man. It was I who planned and brought into action the water-mill, which was the first of its kind in that Saxon England whose peoples we Normans had compelled to bow the head and bend the knee. I designed the chapel, but took little pride therein; for my mind was working on an infinitely nobler project; that is, the design of the Abbey itself. I was a lay-brother here from Noyon long before Reading Abbey was built. It was I who laid out the gardens and planned the fields to yield according to their soil. The Lord God blessed the land, which gave of its best by dint of Norman brains and Saxon labour. It meant that the plough had buried the sword. Peace came, slowly but surely, upon this promised land of God.

“Yet even I, in gazing upon these miracles of paint and canvas and amazing effects laid upon the joyous metals and earths of God, have been dumb; for truly their beauty is beyond words. Each is born of a comprehending spirit which, first dwelling in the natural world to learn, came to the studio, or workshop, and, in the successive steps of progressive art, built to the finished purpose. For thus did I design and build the Abbey of the Benedictines. What is basic in one form of art seems to my uncultured mind to be basic of all arts. The refining of the conception of beauty in men’s minds down the centuries is very clear to me, because I go back to a period when such works as these”—again he swept an all-embracing hand towards the walls—“were unknown. If you, my friends” (he looked down upon the attentive assembly with a gracious smile), “if you, my friends, will tell us something of your experience in connection with your work, it will be my great pleasure to listen and try to understand, and I feel that what would give such pleasure to me cannot fail to give equal pleasure to all.”

My lord Abbot sat down and there was a prolonged murmur of applause. Then each looked at other with some wry faces at the prospect of being called to launch upon the seas of extempore speech, while others smiled, and one or two winked as if the fun was about to commence.

PERUGINO

I watched Perugino for a moment, and I saw Di Credi give him an encouraging dig in the ribs with his elbow. Surely, I thought, considering what I knew about the artist and what I had read concerning the man, there was no one present among this distinguished company more able to fill in a breach of conversation by contributing much first-hand information about his own time, and about his many illustrious friends. Many of the other guests were making wry grimaces at the prospect of being among the first to be called upon to speak, but this was not the case with the animated group of Italians, who showed plainly, by spectacular gestures, their anxiety to catch the speaker's eye.

It did not surprise me at all, when, after a nod of invitation from the Abbot, Perugino leapt gaily to his feet, his long dark hair floating about his shoulders, and his black eyes sparkling mischievously.

A very likeable fellow indeed, I thought. Just as I would expect him to be; the strongly defined nose, the humorous mouth; here was that same Perugino who had painted my two pictures of St. Jerome and St. Sebastian. Often, when I had looked at both these paintings, I had imagined the artist resting on the threshold of his workshop under the serene indigo of the Italian sky, which afterwards as the shadows deepened, became powdered with the gold dust of a million stars; and then, the glory of those other names would suddenly return to me, Verrocchio, Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, brighter luminaries in all that brilliant dust, and brighter than the planets themselves in the radiance of their earthly splendour.

Perugino began to speak after smiling reassuringly at one or two of his companions, and very specially at the celebrated pupil of Verrocchio, Lorenzo di Credi, and at Francesco Raibolini, otherwise known as Francia, one of the handsomest painters who came out of Italy.

"By your leave, my lord Abbot, and my brother artists," said Perugino, "my name, I must tell you, is really Pietro Vanucci, but I am more frequently called Perugino after the name of the town I loved best. This, some of you will agree, is an undoubted honour for the town. Of course, had I taken the name of any other town, that town would also have become equally famous!" Before the murmur of laughter had died away each of Perugino's companions seated on either side of his chair seized him firmly by the sleeves of his rich tunic.

"Now, listen, Perugino, my impossible friend, before you proceed any further." The man who spoke thus I perceived to be no less a person than Francesco Francia. "If I remember rightly," said he, "a wise Ephesian once declared that a man's character is his own destiny. Not only are both character and destiny concentrated in one organ of your body, and one organ only—I mean your tongue—but that same lump of flesh resembles a rat which always scurries just out of reach of the claws of the lean cat of Time, whose other name we have been told is 'Truth!'"

"Indeed it is as you say!" cried Di Credi, holding on still more firmly to Perugino's other sleeve.

"Let me tell you," he continued, "what I remember as if it were only yester-

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

day: the day that I presented this water-wheel of a man, this running brook of a Perugino to our divine Leonardo. Now Leonardo had a way with babblers who wearied him with saying nothing he did not know already—because, if you remember, one could teach the Master nothing—one could only learn, and learn in such a way that it sent the blood into a student's cheeks as if it had been wine in crystal. Well, as I was saying, after Perugino had wearied him for nearly an hour, Leonardo went into his workshop and afterwards returned with a machine of his, which he said was called 'perpetual motion'. Only one part was still required within this mechanism to make it run for ever and ever, he said, but now he thought he had found it in the tongue of our friend Vanucci here. Yes, I seem to see Leonardo now, as he stood there, remote, without a smile, an image of a golden-bearded god!

"You may laugh, gentlemen; for, after all, laugh and be wise, as our neighbours the Venetians say!" He concluded his little speech with a mischievous grin.

During the merriment which followed Di Credi quickly passed a brimming flagon towards his friend. But Perugino did not appear to be the least indignant at the jest against himself.

He merely sighed as he smoothed down the garnet-coloured velvet of his sleeves with his long white fingers. Then, shaking his head with an air of melancholy reflection, he said, "Ah, Leonardo, Prince of Artists, and among men! Sometimes his tongue was sweeter than Apollo's lyre, sometimes as sharp as all the serpent's teeth upon the forehead of Medusa. Nevertheless, whether it was sweet or stinging, there was no word wasted, I can assure you."

He drank deeply out of his goblet, and then went on speaking, raising his voice and striking a determined attitude.

"I will go on," he protested, "in spite of these Barbarians.

"In the beginning I worked in the studio of the great Verrocchio. Indeed, there was so much to see there, and also outside, in our city of Florence. Men of lordly stature came and went like gods, and like gods they cast no shadow in the brilliance of that noonday of our great patron, under whom all we artists laboured with love and gratitude. If a greater man has ever lived on earth than our uncrowned Prince, Lorenzo de' Medici, I have never heard of such a one.

"Unlike other princes, Lorenzo's wealth was not confined in strong chests nor in coffers, because, for the most part, it was composed of heavenly stuff which filled the chambers of his soul. He was generous as a benefactor, and his grateful people, realising his true worth, added to his name the title of 'The Magnificent': Lorenzo the Magnificent!

"He built Art's golden citadel within the boundaries of our beloved city, and made of it a habitation for those immortal men among us, who being so much greater than ourselves, were also very little lower than the angels—Leonardo, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Michelangelo, and the rest, without forgetting my twin seraphs on my right and left hand." Perugino paused and gazed kindly at his two neighbours.

"You were right indeed to speak of golden citadels," said Francia eagerly.



ST. JEROME AND ST. SEBASTIAN

by Perugino

Altar-Piece

PERUGINO

"But would to God that noonday of our great Lorenzo of which you also spoke, could have endured on earth forever, and would to God, also," he added, "that the serpent of envy had not entered in among us, as he has done since the beginning of the first paradise on earth."

"Envy," echoed Perugino sadly. "Envy, ah! there indeed you have it. My dear friend Leonardo himself observed that envy of virtue was as indispensable as the shadow to every human body."

"Stay a moment, my Perugino," interrupted Di Credi, "and do not let a single idea gallop too fiercely away in one direction. I maintain that there is 'envy and envy'. Sometimes, with us, a little honest envy is a healthy symptom. It can be, also, incense to success."

"The ash may fall through the heart of him who first kindles the fire, but, nevertheless, a sweet savour rises to the feet of the god for whom it is burned. Take, for example now, the jealousy of that volcano of a man Michelangelo Buonarroti for our triumphant Leonardo. What harm could it effect? It could not violate a god's immunity. No! Only the burning ember itself remained buried within the fiery brain of that most scurrilous of geniuses, who seemed always to behold the image of the golden Jove through the flames from the forge of Vulcan."

"No, no, my friends, envy is not the primary evil, for, according to our philosopher Ficino, it is ignorance which is the chief enemy of man, and that is certainly the kind of serpent concerning which I feel I should give due warning, gentlemen."

"It is all very well, my friend," protested Perugino. "We all know why you say these things, and we all know how you suffered under the zeal of that fanatic monk called Savonarola who made you burn some of your best work with your own hands. But you must tell us all about that serpent in the habit of a monk when it is your turn to speak."

"Now, where had I got to—let me see," Perugino broke off suddenly and scratched the tip of his nose with his long forefinger.

"I remember," he cried in an apologetic voice; "I had meant to tell you about the glorious frescoes of the divine Masaccio, the honourable Father of our Art, and how all those who were considered to be the greatest painters, came to worship and to wonder at the shrine of their perfection."

"Soon afterwards I was called to Rome," he continued, "and it was there that my work began to take shape beside some of the work of the great Masters of the day."

Perugino hesitated for a moment before lifting up his head in a challenging attitude. "I maintain," he continued, "whatever my friends choose to say, the work I carried out with love and diligence by no means disgraced the Sistine Chapel; and it was only some time later, though now, I confess, I bear the great man no ill will, that all my labour there, or nearly all my labour, was destroyed for no other reason than to make room for the frescoes of that crater of violence, Buonarroti!"

"But even so, my 'Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter' is still in its place,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

and it is likely to remain there, I trust, in spite of all the envious judgment in the world!"

"Envy once again," answered Francia harshly. "Are we never to get away from envy? But I can assure you that it was no petty viciousness which filled the breast of Buonarroti. I honoured him in spite of every fault; because his faults were great faults, all of them! If, indeed, as you have said, his spirit thrived on violence, that was not a fault either. His was a violent star, and all the anguish which it brought behind it like a comet's tail, was, in the end, directed solely against himself. I tell you, my friends, that if it were possible for the gods to pity, as men pity one another, then, surely Leonardo would have pitied the smouldering heart within the breast of Buonarroti?"

Perugino smiled. "Well, that was Rome, and her great painters as I discovered them," he said, "but, nevertheless, I could not forget the beauty of my Umbrian Hills with their blue mists and sunlight of pale gold. In Rome I discovered that there was much to learn which my first masters never taught me. I soon began to paint figures, and compose those separate groups which are linked together by a gesture or a movement, realising in good time that all these things were merely the beginnings of the artist's knowledge of his craft. But I was only twenty-five, and the volume of the Roman world was opening wide before my astonished eyes."

"I remember how you went to Rome," said Di Credi, thoughtfully. "I remember how they said that solitude was out of fashion because you sought out men with your tongue, and made them your companions. I also remember your 'Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter' in the Chapel where it hung. It was, I thought, to that same Chapel, what the Chapel itself was to God."

Perugino shrugged his broad shoulders in the manner of a man well-gratified by a pleasing compliment.

His brightening glance travelled to his *Saint Jerome* and his *Saint Sebastian*. "Ah, yes," he said proudly; "my two panels of Saint Jerome and Saint Sebastian, will you oblige me by looking at them, if you please?"

"It must have been about the year of our Lord, 1498, when I painted them. They were intended to rise above a retable which, it had been suggested, should be raised above an altar bearing six great candlesticks, with a richly appointed tabernacle in the centre. I need hardly say that the original idea was never completed.

"Yes, gentlemen, that is my idea of the good Saint Jerome. He is in the wilderness, the wilderness of the world, and you will see that the lion, which might also represent his own courage, has taken the place of the devil which also might easily have stood behind him. In his right hand he grasps a stone as if he was preparing to strike his naked breast with the flint. But, on the other hand, you have the young Sebastian submitting to the tortures of the heathen. His undraped figure, no doubt, will be very familiar to you; his hands are tied with cord behind the slender trunk of a young tree. And his gaze is fixed upon Heaven itself, which is beyond the reach of any mortal vision save that of the Saint and Martyr. Do you not see how one arrow from the bow of

PERUGINO

the unseen Roman archer has pierced his left side; how another has pierced the fold in the garment across the thighs? In each panel is that background which I knew so well, a tender intermingling of green and brown, showing rocks and water, with the shapes of the hills in the distance, the quiet, sun-drenched hills of Umbria."

Perugino shook his head. "Yes, there is my work as you see it now before you. But I would ask the most critical among you to remember the prejudices which at that time beset the painter on every side, and which, alas, succeeded in imposing their own humiliating limitations. Di Credi, Francia, and you, brother artists, whose names, perhaps, I do not rightly remember, but whose knowledge I already respect, am I not right when I say that the artist is tormented enough in the practice of his craft without being restricted by a tedious catalogue of 'don'ts' from the Church, and those apish men set in high authority? Di Credi's spleenful friar was not the only offender; the Church Herself was always ready to pursue the poor devil of a painter with the red-hot trident of her indignation! We were forced to paint, gentlemen, what we were allowed to paint. Therefore, when you criticise our shrouded figures, remember that same persecution and see whether you would have submitted calmly to such outrageous censorship.

"It was not piety which made us tame white mice, my masters, but authority with a seven-tailed whip, and that was why the budding rose we cherished could not escape the confines of that calyx which would neither refract nor break!"

Perugino was much moved. The veins stood out upon his forehead. "Do you think, you painters who came after us," he demanded, "who came after my friend Di Credi, who came after the great Leonardo himself, do you think the exaltation of the beauties of the human body, whether belonging to man or woman, was your special province? Do you really think that we who went before you were blind, ignorant and uninspired because we did not know the truth about this beauty? If you still think that, you lack wisdom indeed!" Perugino paused hastily for breath, and laid his hand on Di Credi's shoulder, shaking in his agitation.

"But you must not suggest, for a moment, my friend, that anyone is a fool because he is not free to choose for himself," said Di Credi, removing Perugino's hand from his shoulder.

"Ah, free," spluttered Perugino, looking about him with flashing eyes. "Can anyone imagine what would have happened had we shared in those great liberties which afterwards appeared to be the lot of every artist, great or humble."

Suddenly my eyes wandered across the table towards Watteau and his gay neighbour, Boucher. I could almost read the sentence on the latter's parted lips: "Il a les défauts de ses qualités . . . cet homme là!"

Perugino, smoothing back his disordered hair with a sensitively shaped hand, continued: "I do not suppose that there will be anyone here who will deny that every artist feels the same, however much he is prevented from expressing his feeling? There was no lack of sympathy for us in those minds, which were

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

both great and sublime. The 'Magnifico' himself, for instance, was enlightened, as he was strong in that enlightenment, but Mother Church was stronger. She thought first about her innocent children before she thought about those zealous craftsmen who were anxious to adorn her. Artists, too, were always children in her sight.

"She said, as many of us still say: 'I pay the piper and I call the tune', and that was why, perhaps, the nakedness of Truth required a loincloth large enough to cover up the body from the neck to the ankle! Only, when the subject was a Saint Sebastian who was, unquestionably, always represented as wearing very little clothing, were we allowed to paint just so much of the human body as our Mother Church thought fit. Bodies were considered vile and perishable, the unclothed limb was an invitation from the devil and, therefore, anathema. As for the whole body, a man might as well take an uninterrupted squint at old Beelzebub in all his devilry."

Perugino's dramatic look of disgust aroused a little gust of laughter. "It is true, as Perugino says," protested Di Credi. "We were allowed, or permitted, if you prefer the word, to paint our blessed Saviour on His Cross. We might represent Him as a holy babe on His blessed Mother's knees, and sometimes even as a grown man, in a work of pious devotion, but for all that, the Holy Child did not possess the maturity of the adult body, and even those other privileges were worth little, because our bodies must be helpless and wooden, mere representations of art compared to all its final sense.

"I, for one, can fully comprehend our Perugino's dissatisfaction. I longed, I burned, I would almost have jeopardized my immortal soul to paint the living form of man and woman! I wanted to show woman as she is in all the mystery of her beauty. I wanted to reveal man in all his vital strength! As it is, even this Sebastian, which we have been considering, should have been represented as a suffering man in all his nakedness. How else can those looking upon such a spectacle, experience the full force of the sublime act of sacrifice, the naked, unprotected body, utterly forlorn, the target for the sharpened arrows of Death?"

"That is true, that is true, my friends," Perugino agreed eagerly. "Everything else that could be done, I did. I gave nature her own tongue in the colours of my brush, I stretched out the beautiful young martyr's hands and bound them there to that pitiless tree, as pitiless as the condemnation of the world. Do you not see how I accumulated shadow upon the lighter background to give transparency through every shade of colour?"

"What you have achieved, you have achieved with a remarkable perfection, friend Perugino," observed Francia in the calm deliberate voice of one who criticises because his criticism is itself a pleasure. "Your flesh tints, for instance, and the way which you have painted them: you must have gone directly to the Fountain head, for does not nature also work with earth and colours which are from the earth?"

"Somewhere I have heard it said, perhaps by the divine young Raphael or the equally divine Michelangelo that, 'The art of Nature in the beauty of the

PERUGINO

flesh is necessarily of three dimensions, and her canvas is the bone'. To impose a delicate super structure, a covering which is refining and exceedingly beautiful, is not that an art, my friends? Therefore you have painted Nature in her own likeness, my honoured Perugino, and because of that, you have also been true to yourself.

"But that is not all," continued Francia, holding out a restraining hand towards his voluble friend; "you talk of the monks and their infuriating schemes, but now I will remind you of some advice you once presumed to offer the young Raphael, although God knows, he required little advice from you or from any other man—'Paint in the pious peck of pickled pepper,' I think you said, 'as you were instructed to do, but bear in mind that you paint for living men and women as well; remember, *living* men and women! The monks seldom see much further than their noses; they will, perhaps, only dimly realize that your work is different from the rest. You were asked to paint a Saint, very well, paint a Saint, but also paint in as much of Nature as you dare!'"

Perugino threw back his head, and laughed heartily. "Hasty words stick like leeches. Always the old proverb," he replied, smiling at Francia. "But all the same, my friends, that is why you have never seen a Saint Sebastian quite like this one before you. I tell you, all the best which was in me went into that work! I tried to make the picture live. It was alive! I think it is alive now, even as I look at it." He hesitated, and then sighed deeply, recalling, perhaps, the fleeting enchantments of those early days of Umbrian silence and sunlight.

"I think my pictures were always alive," he said quietly after a while, "although, of course, there is something in them which must undergo a change—a change of character not wholly a matter of pigment under different lights. I speak now of that rare medium or patina in which Time alone is the supreme artist, that secret seal which marks the masterpiece for ultimate fame. Time for us now remains an unfamiliar factor, but on that stormy plane where once we struggled, triumphed, failed, despaired, and then triumphed once again, it binds the purpose of an ultimate unity in art and man.

"Time's brush, my friends, is mightiest, it moves more swiftly than a swallow's wing, and yet it lingers with the slow eternal strokes of destiny. Time's brush, my dear companions, must work upon the living and upon the dead; it alone brings the ultimate perfection, it alone creates the final honour. I leave it to you, my friends, to argue now among yourselves whether this same surly potentate has honoured spendthrift Perugino."

CHAPTER V

DI CREDI

PERUGINO sat down, graciously acknowledging an emphatic outburst of applause. Rising upon that wave of appreciation, like a dolphin, it seemed as though he were about to begin again, but a firm hand placed upon his shoulder held him in his place. It was Di Credi's little jest to stand beside his friend, receiving the applause as if it had been intended for him and not for Perugino; although, it was easy enough to see that Perugino's remarks had created a most favourable impression among that critical audience. Even I, myself, had followed every winding drift of the sprightly Italian's discourse, in spite of the great gulf which stretched between our centuries on Earth; and that was not the least remarkable of the experiences within my dream; for I listened to each foreign tongue as if I had been familiar with its accents from the cradle. I understood the trend of every conversation, and whether it was an Italian, Frenchman, German, Englishman or Russian who spoke, I felt that I knew the man, his country, and (more amazing) the language which he spoke.

Now it seemed it was Di Credi's turn; and he, also, appeared much as I had imagined him to be; a man of middle age, dressed in the manner of Perugino and Francia; his sombrely rich garments were indeed those of any respectable citizen of Florence in the fifteenth century. His pleated tunic had been gathered in at the waist, his hose were tightly drawn over his well-shaped legs, and his shoes were long and pointed at the toes.

From his anxiety to begin I concluded he was not the kind of individual to waste much time on ceremony. His voice was musical, and very pleasing to the ear; indeed, it seemed, he knew that he could use it best by playing upon it like a musical instrument.

"My lord Abbot," he began, "I am only too well aware that I follow in the wake of a born orator; when poor Di Credi speaks, it would seem that all the magic words have disappeared like a shining brook which, at full flood, suddenly sinks and disappears into the ground. But whatever you may choose to think, gentlemen, I know quite well how to value the goodwill of my old friend Perugino. What he says of me is partly true, but, you will understand, there has always been that kind of admiration between us which turns a friend into a comrade and a rival into a friend. We worked together under the direction of one of the most remarkable of men, Andrea Verrocchio, who could create the ineffable with all the colours of the sunset; but, at the same time, he was

DI CREDI

not above stifling a young man's satisfaction with his own labour by a blighting fog of criticism as damp and mildewed as any of those which ever issued from the mouth of Tartarus!

"The studio of Verrocchio might have been the ante-chamber to Parnassus itself! It was always full of the splendour of great names—of the friends of the master—men who came and went, who by the loftiness of their mental stature appeared to obscure the common light of day; men as great as Titans, bearing the very firmament upon their mighty shoulders, and dwelling beneath that glorious sun which shone on rich and poor alike impartially—I mean that Solomon of the Medici family whom men called Lorenzo the Magnificent. Beneath that fiery orb of rich beneficence, our Raphael and our Leonardo thrived, and even the swarthy Buonarroti. None of them rebelled against the government of light, but were only hostile to the dark adversaries of ignorance and tyranny. That is how I remember my beautiful Florence; bathed in the amber light of peace, united, just and honourable beneath the equity and wisdom of one great man. 'The Magnifico,' our Lorenzo, you must know, worshipped beauty; and, especially, he worshipped her in our own City. For in those days, good sirs, the name of Florence and the name of Beauty were one and the same. Our Magnifico used to say to each one of us, as we took our leave of him: 'Go! Be happy! Be a Florentine!' That was how it began—peace, sunshine, the work of great men, happiness and contentment, all in one city! Dear God, that was not, alas, how it all ended!

"But in those early days to which I am now once more transported, a perfect golden testament was opened before the eyes of every man, and on the title-page there appeared the name emblazoned also in broad letters of gold—'Lorenzo de' Medici'. It seemed as though a multitude of artists came and offered up their several gifts to that great Guardian of the liberal arts: Leonardo brought the secret of mysterious harmony, effected, so it was whispered, through submission to the personality of some unknown god; Raphael, his natural sense of perfect rhythm, and the rare perspectives of the universe itself; Michelangelo, the terrific powers of a volcano."

Di Credi hesitated and drew in a long breath. "Yes," he said, nodding wisely at Perugino, "you and the rest, my friend, may babble on about Rome and Venice and such places, but I knew well, as a young man, that Florence was the best school in the whole world for the eager apprentice. My training was no less hard because I was eager to learn; discipline, ceaseless practice, and striving, were as the very air breathed in by our lungs; and our training could not have been better; for it was the custom of all artists, to work, first in metals, that is in gold and silver; and Perugino, and friend Francia, will surely bear me out when I affirm that the youth who was careless in his work and his designs received very short shrift.

"To speak first of myself, I learned the art of working in metals from old Master di Credi; and hence, although I was born a Sciarpelloni, I took his name. It was well that I was a good draughtsman, and that I knew the principles of design when I found myself, at last, under the wing of the great Verrocchio

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

himself. As some of you will remember, Verrocchio had already gained a considerable reputation as a sculptor, but when I first entered his studio, he had turned his attention to the sister-art of painting. It was Verrocchio, and no other master, who fired a similar ambition in me, and, because of that, I owe him my heart's gratitude.

"From this time onwards life became a breathless adventure. The days went on turning into weeks like coloured wheels. I was young, fortunate in my friends" (here Di Credi tapped Perugino's shoulder affectionately) "and more than all, recognition, the recognition of those people who mattered, appeared to be coming my way! I do not remember when I first saw the face of Leonardo da Vinci, the 'Angelic Leonardo' we could not help calling him, because of his beautiful countenance, which was also terrible and almost like the passionless face of an Angel. An Angel of wrath, of mercy, or of death. That was the eternal Enigma concerning him. No one knew then, no one knows to-day, what truly his art has represented. Perugino, I think, has also mentioned Leonardo. He knew him too, of course; that is, if anyone ever knew Leonardo, or got near to comprehending the height and purpose of that lofty spirit stretching away and away in ever-brightening spirals towards the infinite vault of remote heaven. As for me, I worshipped Leonardo as my master; I loved Leonardo as my friend. Yes, I loved and I worshipped him, of that there could not be the slightest doubt; but I did not even glimpse a portion of the innermost being of the man himself; and less than nothing of the spirit behind which lay that crystal of sublime intelligence, reflecting every united aspect of the earth and heaven.

"Many people believed they loved Leonardo; many people thought they hated him, because they really loved him best; and that was worse than all the stinging serpents of Perugino put together! Even the hatred of that seething thunder-cloud among men, Michelangelo Buonarroto, was but a frantic admiration in a worshipper possessed! And it is true," continued Di Credi vigorously, "that I learned many wonders from this incredible Promethean who stole upon the sense of the bewildered Florentines, with a cult, a faith, a new religion, call it what you will, which afterwards astonished the world!"

He sighed and leaned his elbows upon the head-rest of his chair. "But what I like to dwell on most," he continued, "is the enthusiasm of that number of young men gathered together for one purpose; believe me when I say that nothing was beyond the bounds of our enthusiasm; and because of the enthusiasm and because everyone was talking at that time about the marvellous 'finish' which Leonardo had given to his paintings, I must attempt, unknown to him, of course, to copy one of his divine Madonnas! Afterwards, to my delight, it was agreed that no one could tell the difference between the original and the copy. Ultimately my picture went to Spain, and what became of it there, I never heard.

"Some say it is not good for the artist to gain independence in early manhood. I am going to raise that question at this moment," said Di Credi, suddenly changing the subject: "Francia, Perugino, what have you to say in answer to so vexed a question?"



THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

by Lorenzo di Credi

Panel

DI CREDI

"Well, after all, the answer which appears to me is very simple," replied Francia gravely. "It surely depends upon the incentive to create within the man himself; the power of the hidden spring needs no correction until it comes to light, the force, the primary force, is there, what comes after is the certain truth that nature will herself impose the discipline!"

"That is all very well," protested Perugino; "but I am only compelled to echo the words of my first masters because they have become my own: 'Discipline and work are the basis of all production in the world of creative thought'."

"But there will be no discipline born of a mere precept," answered Francia, warming to the debate, "and what I say is 'that a man is born with something, or without it, which no master can give him'. Discipline may have its use in later life; the man reshaping his impetuous thought. But how many precious years of wasted talent before the triumph of that discipline, and the release of what has been imprisoned?"

"Well," said Di Credi, smiling, "let us put an end to such an argument. Perugino knows that we were spared the doubt and the necessity of discovering the way to genius for ourselves! We were compelled, too often, by means of a stout rod, to give regularly to time and mental concentration the energy which we would have preferred to direct towards the gratification of our natural desires! And as for those desires themselves, at least, they were always made to play second fiddle to the industry of the moment."

"Work!" cried Perugino. "How I used to hate the word! How, in later years, I came to love it, and to express my gratitude to those wise men who demanded of the youth that he should play the man in all things."

"But for all that, nothing, my friends," added Di Credi, nodding sagely, "nothing is more wayward than genius, and particularly the genius of the painter."

"In the beginning it is a hard life for any strong and healthy boy," said Perugino. "The world without, and the senses and their appetite which belong to it, are fierce competitors; everyone knows how they demand their satisfaction."

Francia smiled: "I know how difficult it was. I had a son who never let me forget that the substance meant so much, the shadow so little! Many old men forget the rich blood racing through youth's veins; that is why the studio can so often be the prison for the damned, until the cultivated sober habit brings with it a new salvation. I remember very well how it was with me. I had my early ambitions; and I saw my visions; but those summer days which seemed as if they would never end; the blue of the skies, the laughing sun outside, the murmur of the distant sea; and above all, the wind which spoke of freedom among the beckoning trees; the stolen glimpses through the high window of the studio! Truly the lot of Tantalus is enviable to the wretch who hears the sound of running waters but cannot wet his thirsting lips; who smells the perfume of the wine within his nostrils, yet cannot slake his thirst!"

Di Credi turned to face the company, a little impatiently. "Be that as it may," he said, "I still thank Almighty God that I was blessed with health and strength. As for those passionate desires which always accompany these blessings,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

I admit I owe the control of them to the wisdom of my masters. Some men, like Leonardo, were powerful enough to rise above them; others, like Buonarroti, as I have been told, could subdue them when they pleased, and, furthermore, direct them in order to serve some high purpose of their own. But, nevertheless, gentlemen, the happy time of freedom will certainly approach, as it approached for me! One comes to work one morning willingly, and under no compulsion, with eyes as bright as the eagle's; then, believe me, there will be no weight on the hand, no heavy cloud upon the vision. For the strong among us to stand for hours at the easel was, in itself, a joy. For the weak and ailing it might have been a martyrdom, but it was, nevertheless, still a joy, the highest of all joys, perhaps, because it was a martyr's joy. We saw immortal courage in those whose work was at once their life and death. If you look for it, you will find their heart's-blood mingled with their colours, and, all this, in spite of Death, who stalked them night and day, and, ultimately, let fall his purple shadow on their work."

"And I remember, too, so well," said Perugino, "that afternoon when our beloved friend Raphael was brought home shivering in his last sickness from the site of the Roman excavations; how that shadow was upon him; I remember how, after his death, our Holy Father Leo, of whom it was said 'that he had forgotten how to shed a single tear', cried out aloud in grief: 'The music of the spheres is broken because the only one who understood their harmony is gone from among us!'"

"Who can say," continued Di Credi, "whether the sick would have obtained still higher attributes with a sound and healthy body; or that the strong possessed an added virtue because of their strength? Who can tell? Each of us must work out his own destiny! If our destinies are writ in heaven, the strength of a man shall not fail, nor his weakness restrain him until his destiny is accomplished. But I wish now to pay my humble tribute to those brothers of our craft who triumphed over frailty; as painters, it is possible that some of us may be their equals; as men, I know that they are greater than Perugino, Francia, or myself."

Di Credi stood for a moment without speaking. It was evident that he was deeply moved. From my corner, I stared at the assembled guests. Some nodded their heads in sympathy, others hardened their features as if in grim recollection. Watteau sat bolt upright in his chair. Lines of pain ran round his mouth, and his dark eyes were deeply shadowed. I could see that he had not forgotten his earthly suffering. Boucher, it is true, appeared to retain his cynical smile, but, I also noticed, that he turned his head away from Watteau.

I was recalled by the sound of Di Credi's voice which had already grown so familiar to my ear.

"My memory for some things is better than for others," he said. "It is strange how we confuse one event with another, especially those events which were significant enough, God knows, in our lives, and in the lives of those whom we loved; but I remember that it was in the year 1531 that I found the retreat I so ardently desired in the church of Santa Maria Nuova.

DI CREDI

"My quarters there were very comfortable; and the pay was thirty-six florini a year, just enough to maintain an independent existence, by which I mean, enough to sustain the needs of an artist with, perhaps, a little to spare. But after all, my friends, the wrong kind of tranquillity is likely, sometimes, to produce a perilous atmosphere—perilous, because it whispers to the inexperience of the egoist that to-day is but as yesterday, and to-morrow will be the same. But the atmosphere, while it lasted, suited my mood of contemplation perfectly, and I was therefore able to paint a picture which I called 'The Coronation of the Virgin'. It hangs upon this wall above your heads, gentlemen; and I know, because most of you are painters, that you will be charitable to that spark of pride which is the last ember in the heart of every artist. Let me, therefore, with your permission, speak to you about this painting. You will see in the upper part of my picture a coronal of glory bursting through the clouds. Our most blessed Saviour is shown in the act of placing the crown of a Queen upon the head of His Mother. Our most blessed Saviour is enthroned upon a dais of clouds. He is clothed in a mantle of the purest blue. The Holy Mother, humbly kneeling, wears an underdress of grey partly covered by a robe of white and gold brocade, which softly discloses a lining of rose-coloured silk. This inner design is enclosed within a circle of protecting cloud; the Son and the Mother being guarded by a fourfold group of red-winged Cherubim. Below, in subordinate devotion to the principal theme, I have placed the four patron Saints of Central Italy. If you will look, you will see St. Nicholas of Bari, the protector of children and moneylenders, dressed in his bishop's robes and wearing a chasuble of green and gold; you will observe that he carried his mitre in his hand. In front of St. Nicholas kneels St. Barbara, Virgin and Martyr, holding a tower, which is her traditional emblem. St. Julian of Rimini stands on the other side: I dressed him in the ceremonial garments of a citizen of Florence. And, finally, you will find St. Christine, also kneeling, clad in a red dress, partly concealed by a dark grey mantle. The figures are set in a tranquil landscape: and in the distance rise the towers and walls of a fortified town. At the base of the picture I painted this small frieze, which you know is called a *Predella*, with Christ in the tomb, occupying the centre; St. Francis on the left, and St. Anthony on the right."

"An excellent commentary," interrupted Perugino, smiling at Francia, "although, perhaps, a little extended with regard to detail; but you must tell them how this masterpiece came to be preserved by a miracle, when everything else which was worth preservation—books, pictures, and the Devil knows what else besides—went pell-mell into the bonfire in order to gratify the gross vanity of one crack-brained friar."

"I'm coming to that," Di Credi protested almost angrily. "But I wished first to tell my friends and brothers in my craft that I put all my knowledge, for what it was worth, all my knowledge of paints and pigments, into this picture which you see before you. I had learned—you know how bitterly one learns—to clarify my oil with exquisite care, to use a separate brush for every colour. Yes, that picture was painted for one of the greatest families in Florence, and went to decorate the altar in an oratory; and I do not think my patrons were

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

disappointed with a labour of love which I had guarded jealously from dust and many another danger! I have done, Perugino, I have done," he concluded, turning towards his friend with tolerant good humour; "and now perhaps you will stop plucking at my sleeve."

"But you must tell them about the monk," Perugino answered with a broad grin. "Otherwise they will not believe that the mad mouth of one imbecile fanatic could confound the wisdom of a hundred wise men."

Di Credi sighed and brushed back the hair from his forehead. "Perugino's serpent," he said; "a stinging serpent, which is the end of every paradise, earthly or divine! Brother Jerome Savonarola! No doubt, if it had not been for his dementia, and his damnable revolt against the Angels of Light, and the Darkness which inspired him, his name would have been covered by oblivion long ago! Now, looking back, and seeing only the beauty which remains, and the serene achievements of the men who worshipped that same beauty, I can only wonder at the sudden burst of diabolical fury, the wanton destruction and the insane enmity of one misguided madman! Who was to blame? I only know that he was able to spread his black wings, black as those of a gigantic bat, between the sun and the roofs of a whole city, which, until that moment, had been the happiest habitation of mankind!"

"I can tell you," answered Perugino vehemently, "if everyone here does not know it already, that it was young Pico de la Mirandola who was alone responsible for the coming of my serpent and your bat. Everyone knew how he stood with the Medici. He had only to open his mouth and suggest something, even if it was as improbable as a chimera, and the next thing one heard was the fabulous had become an accomplished fact, and that the slightest wish expressed by this exquisite and learned young man had been granted. For instance, I remember a conversation at Lorenzo's Villa di Careggi. It was at one of those weekly gatherings which were patronised by you, my two friends, and by Botticelli, and Verrocchio, and by Michelangelo, who could not have been more than twenty-seven years old at the time, and by many others whose names afterwards became houseworld words in our city. I remember they were talking about this same rascal of a Savonarola; and someone, wisely, gave a warning to Lorenzo, and told him the rogue was likely to become a serious nuisance if he was not checked in time; but Lorenzo only laughed and said in that good-humoured way of his, 'Nonsense, my good sir, let him preach to all the women if it amuses him, it may be that by turning their empty heads, he may find a way also with which to touch their hearts. I know the kind of man he is. At the moment he is the fashion; he is a craze; he is in love with popular vanity, if you like to put it that way. A little longer, and we shall see, that he will cease to attract people. One day, my gentle friends, I assure you, that he will go too far; and then, out he will go like a rush candle, extinguished by the breath of those same admirers of his'. Then it was I recall that Pico said: 'But, my Lord, I think he is a good man, for at least he believes in the judgment of God'. 'If that is so,' Lorenzo answered, 'so much the worse for me, and so much the better for him!' You see, he would never take the madman seriously."

DI CREDI

"Even a great man like Lorenzo was not infallible, I know that very well," observed Di Credi in a solemn voice. "How could he recognise in this man the grave-digger of the Florentine ideal, of which he himself was the centre and the symbol?"

"But you must not blame 'The Magnifico' too much, either!" interposed Francia, thoughtfully. "I know it is the custom to place the burden on the widest shoulders; but if you are going to blame anyone for this wild monk's extraordinary success, you must blame the fickle judgment of the people. Some also blamed Lorenzo for letting Da Vinci go to Milan, and Verrocchio to Venice. But in both those cases, it was destiny which gave the order, and not Lorenzo. For instance, if Leonardo had not gone to Milan, there would have been no magnificent statue of the Sforza; if Verrocchio had not gone to Venice, there would have been no monument to Colleoni. So you see, great or small, tyrant or democrat, we are all of us still subject to the inevitable decree of Fate; and in any case," he added, "as Lorenzo himself said, 'Florence was not a prison'. Nor forget either that, wherever the Florentines went, they carried the splendour of their wise Governor with them."

"There may be a great deal of truth in what you say," replied Di Credi bitterly, "but now my mind is ablaze again with the lighted faggots of bonfires in the market-place; and my ears are deafened with shrill denunciations against all manner of heretics; that is to say, everyone who did not agree with the monk and his violent followers! The monk stirred up the bowels, and burst the hearts of the people of Florence with his furious preaching. God knows the power and magic of that wild tongue; may I be forgiven, but I was one of those who exulted along with the demented multitude. His prediction of the scourge of God upon Italy was shouted from the house-tops! The French King with his Germans, Scots, Swiss and Bretons, were already on the road to Florence when the monk went out to meet the 'Instrument of Vengeance' sent by heaven to punish a wicked and rebellious people. Alas, alas, for the peace and sanity of the Villa de Careggi; for the enlightened guests, who had gathered there; and the noblest of patrons who was as munificent as Maecenas and as wise as Plato! After the noble Medici and his family were driven into exile, the hysteria of the populace rose to a high fever. The streets were full of people shouting as if they were drunk or lunatic: 'In the early church the vessels were of wood not of gold! The early martyrs wore plain cloth, not purple and fine linens! Down with the harlot of gold and scarlet! Down with the nakedness and corruption of the flesh! Down with the idolators! Down with the sinner, the proud and the rich!' It was not the punishment of God which came upon the few, but the madness of the monk which afflicted the many. The monasteries and convents were besieged by converts headed by Mirandola himself, and among them the incomparable Della Robbia, who actually took the robe and entered the convent of San Marco; yet at the same time, the gentle Ghirlandajo was murdered by the orders of the furious Monk, and all his paintings condemned to be destroyed by the command of 'the Mouth of God'! Bonfires of 'vanities' were sending up smoke and flames to the Italian skies; there was no discrimination

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

in these acts of vandalism. Silks and fine cloth, laces and raiment of all kinds, books, especially the profane editions of the classics, precious manuscripts, pictures, and all manner of works of art, were consigned to those devouring flames. There were many sad and broken hearts in Florence in those evil days."

Di Credi moistened his dry lips. "How it was," he continued, "I never knew, but I, too, became infected with that satanic madness. Into the flames my pictures went, one after the other, as the spirit of cruelty and destruction increased every hour. I wept and even joined the chanting of the penitential psalms as I saw the canvas crackle and wither in the flame before my benighted eyes. For me, under that fantastic spell, and under that most abominable enchantment, the nakedness of the figures which I had painted seemed to be the nakedness of all the sinful world; let all perish, only God and Savonarola remain!"

After what seemed to me a long pause Di Credi sighed more deeply than before, and inclining his head, said with a calm which was in strange contrast to his former display of emotion:

"By God's Grace my 'Coronation of the Virgin' was preserved. How, I do not know. Sometimes, I like to think, that in the house-to-house search for works of art by Savonarola's fanatical crew, a young monk came suddenly upon it, and that even though the flame of destruction was hot in his heart, something in my picture stayed his hand. I like to think of his fierce gaze growing tender as a strange humility overcame him. I seem to hear the axe in his grasp clatter to the floor as he turns away in prayer. My friends," Di Credi's voice sank almost to a whisper, "when I consider the inevitable purpose of God, I, too, can only turn my head away and pray!"

CHAPTER VI

FRANCIA

“**W**HAT does it matter, gentlemen,” said Francesco Raibolini, more familiarly known as Francia, “whether this stubborn mule of a Perugino, and those of a similar hide, deny that my Bologna was the Alma Mater Studiorum of all the arts in Italy; the wisest heads believed that it was so, and the wisest heads are never wrong, especially when they happen to be set upon the shoulders of master-craftsmen.”

There seemed to be an unusual amount of assurance in this speech. Dignity shone in Raibolini's beautiful features, from the forked beard to the high calm forehead. As he talked, his fingers played with the gold chain of a decoration about his neck; and by the time he was fairly launched upon his discourse, his fine eyes sparkled as he addressed the company. “We are not here to clap one another upon the shoulders and to compliment our friends in order to gain compliments for ourselves,” he said drily. He looked at Perugino and Di Credi before continuing with a sly smile: “But as, I am sure, we are all agreed on that point, I may as well take you all into my confidence and say that if there is any shoulder-clapping to be done, it should be reserved for one person, and one person only, I mean myself!” Ignoring the sarcastic exclamations of the guests which followed instantly after such a provocative remark, Raibolini's musical voice flowed on without further interruption:

“If you have never heard of the Raibolini, that in no way detracts from the ancient honour of the name, it simply means that your instruction has been neglected and, because of that, you are going to hear about the Raibolini family now! I suppose some people considered my father a very prosperous man in his day, but although he was one of the leading goldsmiths in his own City, I can tell you that he certainly believed in a lad fending for himself. He had gone through the mill in his time, so he ought to have known what he was talking about. Nor did I myself even have the advantage of beginning with one foot upon the ladder of Success. The only ladder I remember was the one by which I climbed to polish the upper windows of the Master-Goldsmith's house when they needed cleaning after the foul weather.”

“And I'll be sworn that ladder served another useful purpose, too,” laughed Perugino. “Especially if that same master kept his wenches like his doves, in warm little cotes as near as possible to the sun.”

“I see you again at this moment,” answered Francia, “as a comrade of those early days; another of those wild ragazzi, a mere sweeper-up-in-ordinary,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

employed for all the roughest kind of jobs which no one else would do. After that villainous law was passed which commanded that all sweepings were to be examined by the wardens of the craft in order to prevent a waste of valuable metal, the ragazzo had a most unenviable time of it, blistering his palms, with little else to show for his scars! Our masters must have been magicians, dear Perugino, I am sure you will agree, for how else were they able to take those innocent hours of the night and add them to the working day? It has always remained a mystery to me. It was thus, however, that, like my two friends beside me here, I came to learn all business of drawing and design, of raising and chasing; and, also, in the later years of my apprenticeship, the art of engraving as well, and the process of etching metals with what is known as aqua-fortis. I do not wish to weary anyone with tales of what I could and what I could not do, but at the same time, I must not forget to mention that one day the whole city of Bologna was in a state of excitement. In the window of my Master's shop I had exhibited some tricky little pictures measuring no more than two-fingers' breadth, and each containing as many as twenty figures in perfect proportion; and I can tell you that from that time onward enamelling and its mysteries held no secrets from me."

"Were they so small, and yet so perfect?" enquired Perugino. "I must confess it is difficult to believe what one has never seen."

"Concerning that, you must take my word," replied Francia, proudly, "for with the withdrawal of the protection of my noble patron, Bentivoglio, nearly all this work was wantonly destroyed."

"The unhappy lot of artists," exclaimed Di Credi, shaking his head, "and yet, even if their work is not destroyed for them, they will sometimes deliberately destroy it themselves!"

"I have only told you all this," continued Francia, "because I wish you to know that Bologna was at least the equal of Florence in the training of her craftsmen." Francia held up his hand, checking a flippant retort which had risen to the lips of Perugino. "My gratitude comes warmly from my heart," he said simply; "I cannot recall those early days without remembering the generosity of her chief citizens; and then there was that most beloved of masters; it was a great honour for me when people began to call me Francia in place of Raibolini; I began to wonder whether I should prove worthy, after all, of so honourable a name.

"From the gentle tolerance of kindly men," he went on, calmly, "I approached the splendid lustre of the court of Florence, with shaded eyes; for Lorenzo's villa was as sumptuous as the palace of any Emperor, and for me, it was indeed a long step on the road I had chosen. I left, I say, the men I knew, and encountered for the first time in my life, strange characters who proved themselves quite unknowable, being unknown even to themselves. It is easy, my good sirs, for my friends to claim acquaintance with this great man and that great man, but, I demand of you, how much does one ever learn about these solitary geniuses? Leonardo, as deep and as profound as the Adriatic Sea, with that perpetual haze, that shimmering mystery upon the surface of his soul; I



MADONNA AND INFANT CHRIST
by Francesco Francia
Panel for Shrine

FRANCIA

saw him, but I did not know him. Perhaps I only feared him as one fears the slumbering storm beneath the tranquil surface of the sea. Raphael I also saw; but there again, I only bowed my head before his glory as Adam might have done, being suddenly confronted with the Archangelic Guardians of his Paradise. Michelangelo? Ah, that is quite a different story. It was not possible to know him either, but one could love him, I should say, adore him, as I adored him; it was always so with such a man, one who could comprehend the terrible tempest of creation with a kindred soul, such as the divine Dante's, whom he worshipped passionately and emulated in his poems. I say, one either hated Michelangelo or loved him. I loved him, and each time I met the man the life leapt up in me in quick response towards the fire of life in him. Like the inspired Masaccio, who had breathed new life into the more formal art of men, like Giotto, who had preceded him, Michelangelo breathed life into everyone and everything. There was an air of lightening about him, as if he had but recently descended from an awe-inspiring communion with a God upon some distant mountain-peak, beyond the flight of eagles; yet one could love such a man. And if, in spite of all that Titan strength, he had his human weakness, one felt that it was also divine, like the weakness of a child."

"Dante, Michelangelo and Da Vinci," murmured Di Credi sorrowfully; "all of them we know loved Florence, and yet their only reward was banishment or weary exile."

"No matter," retorted Francia, "whatever their lot, we know that they were above self-pity and other men's compassion!"

"Nevertheless," said Perugino, "when we visited your city it was the name of Francesco Francia which we heard from everyone's lips; your name, my dear friend, not the name of the haughty Buonarroti. Everywhere in Bologna they said to us: 'Have you seen the frescoes in the Palace of the Bentivogli?' and, 'Have you seen the new Madonna of our Painter, standing with her hands joined in prayer before the Holy Child?' or, 'Surely there was never such a hedge of a sweet-briar as that hedge which he has painted around the Virgin and her Son?' Yes, dear Francia, you underestimate your own delicate skill, remembering the criticism of jealous artists who dispraised everything they could not underrate; for instance, take this Michelangelo himself, this man you profess to love so much, was he not born with a forked tongue in his mouth? Everyone knew quite well why he detested Leonardo and Bramante; it was merely because they stood in his way, and came too near the threshold of his own particular genius, and I will tell you another thing," Perugino added almost maliciously. "After he had accompanied to Bologna the great Pontiff Julius, a man cast out of the same iron mould as himself; after he had seen the beauty of your frescoes, my dear friend, I feel sure he was glad when he heard that the Pope's hired ruffians had destroyed them all in his quarrel with the Bentivogli."

Francia shook his head. "Ah no," he replied, "even at that time I believe I was getting too old to bear malice against men who wronged me, not through ignorance of my work's quality, but for their own pride. I understood that the world has a lesson to learn through the failure of their pride. True that at that

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

time, things had gone hardly with me. It is not easy for a man to exchange the goodwill of a generous master for the proud authority of a tyrant; and no one here will fail to comprehend the depths of my humiliation when I say that I was commanded by the victors to engrave a medal celebrating the triumph of the quarrelsome Pope over all my generous friends and patrons. As for the lonely Michelangelo, I tell you, I loved him even then, as I do now; and I pitied him all the more because of that intolerable pride which hurt him more than it hurt any of his friends! I know he did not attempt to make things easier for me; but as I have said before, so often, how could he, who himself travelled always over pits and quagmires full of pointed stakes, make smooth the path of any other man? That is why I bore him no ill-will. One day, in the city, when he was engaged in casting Pope Julius the Second's statue from the molten metal of the bell stolen from the Bentivogli chapel, I told him that I admired the work, and that he was using good metal; but he dismissed me with a rough gesture, and replied that he did not wish for my compliments; and that was at a time when, as I have said, my cup of humiliation was running over; but I did not love him any the less because of what he said."

"Not love him any the less?" echoed Perugino in exasperation. "Why such a man, though he was Painter to the Court of Jupiter, was not worthy of such devotion. To begin with, he did not know the meaning of honest admiration at all!"

Francia smiled, indulgently: "I see, my Perugino, that you will never be able to comprehend the real nature of him who was the creator of an art so pure in its primeval revelation; so compelling, and so divine, that nothing before it, since the discovery of the ancient Rhodian sculpture of the Trojan Laocoon in the time of Cæsar Augustus, could ever compare with its immensity and power."

"And again, you are wrong when you say that Buonarroti did not know the meaning of admiration, which has its root in love. The trouble was, I think, that he understood it only too well; but that, under his own presiding planet of despair, he completely misunderstood its origin. Some said that Leonardo, for instance, had no heart at all; but that all the blood of life became with him a rare distilled white ichor which was generated through the brain to all the vital parts of the body! Surely, those same people could not say as much of Michelangelo? The heart which burned so fiercely within that breast, was primarily concerned with burnt-out stellar fire; with fiery portents and with meteorites; with thunder, earthquakes, and floods. It is impossible to forget, too, that Michelangelo was a man of the Old Testament. I know how he had steeped himself in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah; and he was not only inspired in a great deal of his work by the pessimistic outlook of those prophets, but also by their maledictions! He even went so far as to paint these very prophets; although, under his powerful influence, which changed the character of everything he touched, they became the classic forms of his own imagination, in the light of which the artist quite forgot their original identity. In the same way, I think, he also laid aside the power of love, forgetting its chief attribute, which is, as most charitable men believe, to conquer without subjection."

FRANCIA

"But you should not forget to tell them," interposed Di Credi, "that the figure of the prophet Jeremiah, which he painted some time in the year 1511, is really a self-portrait;* that it represents a life-like study of your Buonarroti, the apostle of despair; and in looking at it, I, for one, confess that I began to understand why it was that the lamentations of the most melancholy of all the prophets should have influenced the dark soul of the painter more than, for instance, the loving parables of our Lord Christ."

"I agree," replied Francia eagerly. "Even among his Sybils in the Sistine Chapel, and among his naked Prophets, it is the strange personality of the man himself which always intrudes itself."

"At least he appears to have understood, with Donatello, Ghiberti and Verrocchio, what the rest of the world seemed to have forgotten; and that is, that the naked art of Greece was the beginning and end of all that was great in Art," admitted Perugino, with a grudging movement of his hand.

"Now I think it is time to remind you how I became a painter," said Francia, modestly; "and that was indeed a great change in my life, for you know that by adopting a new medium in art it is possible to change the course of a whole career. Among my intimate companions I was fortunate enough to count the famous Andrea Mantegna. It was he who often assured me that the door which had opened wide to him would surely open to me, too. That, for instance, is one of the best pictures which I ever painted"—he indicated gracefully his *Madonna and Child*. "Perhaps there are some among you who will be inclined to observe that there is not much of it as a picture, and, of course, with regard to mere quantity, you will certainly be right. But it was never my opinion that to be impressive a picture must necessarily be large. My object, always in purpose and execution, was to strive for height of conception and depth of feeling, rather than to achieve the dramatic and the sensational. Now let me tell you something, gentlemen," he added thoughtfully. "I attempted in that picture to express a single, heartfelt 'Ave', and not a meditation on the divine motherhood. I wanted to conceive a perfect expression of love apotheosized and immaculately pure. You will see, therefore, that the question of mere dimensions was to me of little importance."

For a moment Francia hesitated, looking down into Perugino's smiling countenance. Then he also smiled, and sighed as he smiled. "Yes, friend Perugino, I know very well what you are wondering now. Am I going to tell them all the story, inseparable from that picture? As I have told you, even Michelangelo had his weakness. God alone knows, therefore, why, in my humility, I should be ashamed of mine? For my model, then, my model of the Holy Mother, I will tell you how I took the form and features of an innocent young girl. She was the daughter of gentle birth of one of my patrons. Her name was Donna Maria.

"The divine Dante understood the passions of the human soul as well as all

*The resemblance to Michelangelo has been strongly asserted, but remains conjectural. For a critical study of the whole problem of the Buonarroti iconography, see "The Authentic Likeness of Michelangelo", by C. R. Cammell: *The Connoisseur*, September 1939.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

the exaltation of the spirit," he continued, sighing still more wearily. "Alas, with the increasing frailty of the flesh, we sometimes love, on an earthly plane, those rarer beings who have attained already the foretaste of a heavenly existence. Donna Maria, like the immortal Beatrice, was, I knew, such a perfect being; at least, she was beyond reach of human worship. And yet, I often wondered how, within the little span of time called life, it was possible for a secret to be so well kept that even the one by whom it should have been shared was not aware of it.

"Can a man look and see, and then lower his eyes as though too bright a light had smitten them, and still be unobserved? Can he study each separate feature, know every facet of a maiden's loveliness, fuse them into warm colour and form, and at the same time remain calm, preserving an attitude of indifference, so that she shall never know? Can he walk in the great apartments and gardens of her Father's house, see her, yet himself remain unseen? My Madonna used to smile when we chanced to meet on the banks of the stream which ran through the gardens; and, after she had gone, I used to fall trembling upon my knees, cross myself, and whisper under my breath: 'Ave Maria, Madonna Mia!' as if I were praying to the Holy Virgin Herself! I was only saved, I think, from the consequences of all this blind adoration—blasphemy, some folk might call it—by the fear of her purity and the adoration of her innocence. But that which I treasured in my heart, remained for ever undefiled, and I believed that I could keep my secret, bearing it with me to the grave."

He closed his eyes for a moment. "With the fallen glory of the Bentivogli, a bright star fell, and I was lost in darkness; and in that darkness my Madonna also left me for those regions of light which are beyond imagination of the profane lover. Even now," he added, sadly, "even now, though it all happened so long ago, I think I see her in her serene loveliness and purity pacing the higher courts of Dante's paradise, while I remain upon the outer fringe of lesser-souls, carrying to the judgment seat my heavy burden of mortal fidelity. Will she, perhaps, on some bright day of glory come down to me again, or shall I, after undergoing the penance of a lingering separation, arise out of the dust and be suffered to approach her sublime innocence with all my weakness conquered in the final triumph of my spirit? There is another question also, which I continually ask myself; will the revelation come to me at last, of the eternal beauty through her beauty? These questions are contained within my pictures; they wait there for answers, like the poor body for the resurrection."

He raised his eyes adoringly to the picture of the *Madonna and Child*. "When I look on my Madonna, as I do now," he continued, in a humble voice, "I see that I have put the very spirit of the purest maid in Christendom into the symbols of holiness and perfect love."

Leaving his place at the table, Francia strode across to the wall and proceeded to take down his glowing masterpiece. He held it for a little while within his arms, and then, before replacing it, he passed a caressing hand over the frame. "I painted my Madonna many times," he said solemnly, "but always my compassionate creations kept their secrets. Sometimes I painted my

FRANCIA

Beloved wearing a red robe as the symbol of the depth of her painter's devotion; but over that red robe I would drape her own serene blue cloak, in order to hide my passion, which the hard world would have surely misunderstood. I knew that all Donna Maria's loveliness was in my figure of the seated Virgin, of which the good citizens of Bologna were so proud; but, nevertheless, my brothers in the craft, I do not think that it will in any way surprise you when I say that I dared not paint *too* faithfully, for fear of betraying my own soul. Heaven knows, I was as cunning as a serpent, but as the wisdom of the serpent is mostly in her cunning, then both must come from God."

Inclining his head, Francia was silent, looking down at the table; and the silence which had taken possession of him seemed to expand and to embrace many of his fellow guests. It was not long, however, before Perugino was busily whispering in his neighbour's ear. Suddenly Di Credi said aloud for everyone to hear: "Indeed, as Perugino tells me, it is remarkable; the expression, and the way you hold your head as you look down upon the table. It is Lotti's bust of you, dear Francia! I realise now the faithfulness of that portrait which indeed must have been a labour of love as well as a memorial."

But Francia's answering smile was full of strange melancholy. "I have said," he resumed—though more in the manner of a man talking to himself—"that afterwards, a darkness seemed to descend upon all our Italy; a darkness which appeared to cover everyone and everything, accompanied, too, by that restless weariness which often comes with the aftermath of a great conflict. It was not only losing her, who once had brightened every path of my existence; no, it was not just that, though God knows that was desolation enough in itself; but one by one, the great lights were being extinguished; even Buonarroti was well advanced upon his lonely road of exile and despair; only one tremendous beacon still remained burning brilliantly upon the horizon, but burning, as remote and as mysterious as the rising moon. I speak of Raphael D'Urbino. His was the one mysterious fire of friendship to which I turned my dying heart; for from him proceeded that heat and light which ageing hopes require."

As Francia paused he seemed to take a lingering breath; then, to his surprise, and to the astonishment of many others who had been listening intently to the Bolognese, a mild beneficent voice suddenly demanded from the head of the table: "Before you proceed any further with your narrative, my son, would it not be fitting to gratify an old man's curiosity? An old man who once, long ago, in his vanity imagined that he knew so much. I must confess," continued the Abbot—for it was the Abbot himself who spoke—"I must confess, my son, to being strangely moved by the thought of that young man, Raphael, being brought home to die in a manner which strangely recalls to my mind the story of the blessed Lazarus. I repeat, would it not be possible to tell those among us, who do not know, more about this young man Raphael, whom our blessed Saviour must have loved and pitied on account of his youth and his suffering?"

"My lord Abbot," replied Francia, unhesitatingly, "I was about to speak of him, but even with the indulgence of this company the story of his short life

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

is much too long to be told here. However, I must inform your Reverend Lordship that the early days of our beloved and now immortal Raphael D'Urbino were very much the same as those of any other painter. His father was also something of an artist, but his mother owned a grocery shop. Strangely enough, however, it was his mother who best understood their sensitive and talented son; at any rate, she did not undervalue his great gifts; and while the father instructed the boy in the rudiments of painting, she herself gave him lessons in the art of music; and later on, because of this, Raphael could, when he chose, sing and accompany himself on the zither like an Angel.

"And look like an Angel, too," answered Di Credi in a reverent undertone.

But Francia folded his arms sedately, which was a characteristic habit of his, as he gazed earnestly at the Abbot. "Our Raphael must have loved his gentle mother very much," he continued, "for it was easy to see that he put a great deal of her character into his sublime Madonnas. He could not have been more than sixteen years old when he decided to go to Perugia." Francia hesitated, turning his face with an enquiring glance at Perugino.

"Just sixteen years old," said Perugino, nodding his head. "I remember him when he came to me pale, and as beautiful as the angel Di Credi says he was. He lived in my house, and I grew as fond of him as if he had been my own son. There can be no doubt about the way in which he drew the love of everyone towards him. Here indeed was a favourite of the Gods, and one saw the flame of his charitable heart leaping up within the crystal vessel of his spirit. Yes, here indeed was someone whom it was possible to love and worship at the same time! Francia talks of loving an ironstone image of a man like Buonarroti, but surely that was impossible. How could one love a man whose violent jealousies were like corrosive acids? No, let me finish, Francia," he persisted, with increasing emotion. "The jealousy of this sulphurous Buonarroti would have followed our gentle Raphael even into the grave. Do you not remember how, in order to vex him and to discredit him in the eyes of the Holy Father, Buonarroti assisted Sebastiano del Piombo, in secret, to produce works which, because of his magnificent draughtsmanship, appeared as masterpieces before the eyes of Pope Julius? Everyone knows how the old bear, like every other man, was always pleased by novelty, and for this very reason, delighted in creating every sort of rivalry between the artists who surrounded him."

"That may be so, that may be so, my Perugino," said Francia in an impatient voice, "but let such things sink back into oblivion where they certainly belong! His Reverence has asked to hear a little more of the, alas, too brief history of our angelic friend."

Perugino shrugged his shoulders, mumbling something it was difficult for the ear to catch, about, "Serve your precious Michelangelo right, when afterwards people thought Sebastiano was a better artist than himself".

"Then," continued Francia calmly, "I suppose Raphael must have been about twenty when he heard about the master of masters, Da Vinci."

"And when he decided he would go to Florence to work with Leonardo, as his pupil, it was I who encouraged him," Perugino interrupted him; "because

FRANCIA

I knew, at least as far as I was concerned, that he was already far above me in colour, technique, and imagination!"

"I protest," began Francia, at the same time checking himself and accepting his friend's mute apology. "Under the divine Leonardo," he continued, "Raphael was first to feel the depths of secret power; to sense the exalted mystery within himself; and oftentimes to feel at one with his great master's internal discipline and outward harmony with the whole universe. And as Michelangelo plumbed the depths of Dante's poetry, until he claimed himself to be the other half of that great poet's spirit, so Raphael immersed himself in the philosophies of Plato and Ficino, until he came to identify himself with their ideas. At length he came, in Rome, face to face with that most terrible of all the Popes, the great bear, Julius II. The Pope by this time, so it seemed, had had enough of Michelangelo, and the detached skill of the Titans; he said he wanted more humanity; and that, I think, was why he also said that the drawings of the young Raphael revealed to him a new and glorious world. He commissioned his 'New Wonder' to paint the walls of his private apartment in the Vatican, and, from that moment, Raphael was the bright new star in the firmament of artists."

Francia added hastily, with a warning glance at Perugino: "You may not quite condone the savage mood of our temporarily eclipsed friend, Michelangelo, but surely you can understand his natural indignation? Concerning the young Raphael himself, there does not seem much more to say, except that he, who hitherto had been so much loved, at last encountered Love himself. We do not know—not even those of us who were his friends—much about the woman of his heart, whose serene beauty still shines enduringly upon us from out of the wide canvas of the Sistine Madonna; but we do know that it was she, and she alone, who touched the final secret spring in the heart of the young genius who lived long enough to be acclaimed the greatest painter in the world!"

As if suddenly overcome by weariness, Francia lowered his head. "Let me finish, gentlemen," he said regretfully, "because I must confess this little tale has made me very sad. Raphael, I remember, accompanied Pope Leo X to Bologna. He came to visit me. I was getting old and very tired of men; but his visit was a great comfort to me, and a great honour, too. He was good enough to praise my work. 'Let us correspond regularly with one another, dear Francia,' I can still hear him say in that melodious voice of his, as we exchanged portraits on the eve of his departure from the city. A few months later occurred that catastrophe in my life, that moment in my life which I shall never forget as long as I have memory."

Francia was deeply moved. "How could it be that such a sympathetic and generous friend could with one tremendous blow (although it was never struck) paralyse the power of my hand; with one terrible judgment from his lips (although it was never spoken) dry up the wells of all creation in my spirit? Buonarroti could never achieve so much, not even when he told my handsome son to go and tell his father 'that he makes better men in the night than he

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

does by day'. No, not even the awe-inspiring Leonardo, with his infernal indifference of the anatomist and mathematician, could have done this thing to me.

"This is what happened," continued Francia, controlling his wandering thoughts with difficulty. "My beloved Raphael sent his painting of Saint Cecilia to Bologna. It was to hang in the Convent of St. Giovanni in our City. As a friend, he asked me if I would help to unpack the picture and, moreover, to make good any weakness which I might discover in his painting. As if I should have dared to even touch the sacred canvas with the tip of my brush! I ask you to believe me, gentlemen," he continued reverently, "after I had unpacked that wonderful and mysterious revelation of the divine soul of this man, the first painting I had seen by the hand of this young genius who was to conquer the world and silence kings, I fell upon my knees and joined my hands in prayer before his mighty inspiration! My mind immediately became filled with the prophetic words of the aged Simeon: 'Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen the light'. From that time onwards I went every day to San Giovanni, and as I knelt before the sublime picture I knew that I would never paint again. Relentlessly the sentence was laid upon my head, even by the young friend whom I had honoured and admired above all other brother artists of our craft. Relentlessly the sentence ever afterwards remained irrevocable, as if it had proceeded out of the mouth of Rhadamanthus himself. This was my doom. I covered my poor brushes with black crêpe, but I was left with but one desire, to live the remainder of my days on earth inspired and comforted by the memory of the greatest picture which my eyes had seen, and which still shines even now before my vision, like the eternal sun of Beauty which never sets."



ST. HELEN

by Cima da Conegliano

CHAPTER VII

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

WITH the words "Be a Florentine" still echoing strangely in my ears, I suddenly became aware of the Venetians. Apart from the fact that it was easy to recognise the familiar features of the two brothers Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, there was something unmistakable about these olive-skinned descendants of Latin mariners, something which suggested, and preserved in the suggestion, the dignity and opulence of the famous Adriatic city. There was no need, it seemed to me, to urge in their case, "Be a Venetian", because it was apparent that their own particular local atmosphere enveloped each one of them like a familiar garment.

Having easily distinguished the famous sons of Jacopo Bellini (for, surely, no two faces more faithfully resembled the portraits painted of them, and bequeathed to posterity) my doubts concerning the identity of the grave companion, who accompanied them, were quickly dispelled by the voice of the elder Bellini himself, as he inclined his head in the direction of the Abbot. The figure of this gentle Venetian was invested with an air of marked solemnity, something quite personal, belonging rather to a mental refinement and the tranquillity which proceeds from it, than from any dignity acquired by rank or reputation. One found oneself instinctively respecting the calm beneficence of such a man as Gentile Bellini.

"I should be wronging my compatriots and friends," he said, "if I did not attempt to make it plain from the beginning that we, as servants of our most illustrious free republic, did not revere the laurel crowns of other cities and, consequently, the names of those great men which, by common consent, are recorded on the golden scroll of fame.

"However, we are not here to speak of our achievements; that is, indeed, if those who followed after us, considered the work we did as worthy of distinction? No, when we speak as Venetians, we must speak in the name of our most beloved of cities, our Mother and our Nurse, acknowledging that through her reputation we served the cause of Art; and if we are to be remembered at all, we are remembered through her imperishable glory.

"Gentlemen, as I have said, 'Let Venice speak through us'; but as for vulgar approbation, and the mutability of popular favour, let them pass. Whenever I hear a man talking of what he has done or what he has not done, I think of the persistence of the spider; of the boldness of the eagle; of the agility of the

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

pard, and the wisdom of the serpent; beside any of these, how can the arrogant satisfaction of a single man endure?

"This is my friend," he said, resting his hand on the arm of his solemn neighbour, Messire Giovanni Battista da Conegliano. "Tell them, Giovanni," he continued, "tell them how we lived in Venice, and what we planned together; and does it also seem so long ago to you, my friend?"

Conegliano, rising stiffly to his feet, nodded and replied: "Like an ancient boat, once more, I slip down into the water, remembering those little waves we once thought to be so significant, lapping against my groaning sides. Those waves, Messire Gentile, they were nothing—no more than ripples on the surface of the controversial current of opinion! However much I protested in my time, there were those who insisted that my style was somewhat imitative of the manner of your illustrious brother here, Messire Giovanni; but although it is true that I admired him very much, it is certainly not true that I deliberately copied his technique!"

Giovanni Bellini instantly turned a frank and smiling countenance upon the speaker: "Come," he demanded lightly, "what is there to be ashamed of in acknowledging that as friends we none of us could entirely evade the influence of the other? But, surely, you have little cause for dismay, Messire da Conegliano; for no one was better at his own method of composition, or in his particular invention, which harmonised in some mysterious way, the perfection of all colours with the beauty of the landscape."

Conegliano looked pleased at this; and then proceeded with a deliberation which was completely different from the even temperament of the Bellini.

"According to the words of Messire Gentile," he said, "it is wise to speak more of our great city, and less of ourselves; but as it is only through oneself and one's own personal association with a place, however great or small, that one can speak with any authority, I must tell you that Venice changed the world for me; changed my vision, and the power of my hand. It was only after I had left the town of Conegliano, my birthplace, that I began to paint in oils instead of tempera; and it was during my time in Venice that I painted that picture over there, which you may not have noticed.

"I take it that everyone will be familiar with the story of how the spouse of the most blessed Emperor Constantine discovered a portion of the true cross, and how she brought it to Europe to be adored by all the peoples of the Western world. As you see, she is represented in my picture, which was commissioned to hang in the Basilica della Santa Croce di Gerusalemme."

He paused, and to my surprise his features relaxed with a smile. "I think now," he said, smiling more broadly, "of those happy days of brotherhood in Venice, Messire Gentile and Messire Giovanni, and I must not forget to mention our much honoured friend Andrea Mantegna. Indeed, sirs," he added vehemently, "I assure you that we were all more like brothers than friends. We were always ready to assist and advise one another; and if we could avoid it, we were not separated for any length of time, except on such occasions as when Messire Gentile was sent to Constantinople to paint a picture for the Grand

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

Turk!" Conegliano shook his head: "Poor Messire Gentile, he had good cause to remember that journey!"

"What you say is very true, my friend," answered Gentile Bellini. "It was a sober-minded westerner who was called upon to put the ancient proverb to the test, 'Strange fruits ripen upon strange trees'."

"And to think that such a journey was made upon my account," interposed his brother. "If you remember, the Turk had seen a portrait which I had painted, and had sent a message to the Doge requesting that I should be instantly despatched to Stamboul in order to make a faithful copy of the most seraphic Oriental Countenance! But I was selfish and fond of my home comforts, and therefore I refused to go. It was left to Gentile, the most unselfish brother in the world, to take my place."

Gentile, smiling, shook his head. "Some of us are born with wings," he answered. "That is how it is, with the pinions of a bird of passage. No matter how fair the land, or the valley which shelters us, there comes a day when the wings unfold, and must be spread. I was always ready to spread my wings, although there was no more beautiful place on earth than my own home; but I must confess," he added with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, "that the visit to the Court of the Grand Turk seriously curtailed my wandering instincts, at least for a little while! Yes," he exclaimed, "my encounter with the Sultan Mohammed II was an experience comparable only to some of the fantastic situations in the stories those Moslems tell; only, of course, Mohammed was no fable! He was indeed a strange manifestation of a real man, uniting the cunning of a reptile with the credulous imagination of a child. For instance, the portrait of himself which I painted on canvas seemed to him to be little short of a miracle; such a magic revelation had never taken place before in the whole of his experience; and when he watched me at work on my own portrait as I stood facing a mirror, the skill which I thought might have enhanced my reputation was all forgotten in strange comparisons with the ancient sorceries of the East!"

Giovanni Bellini threw back his head and laughed heartily. "But you must not omit to mention, Brother," he said, "how the sly barbarian found a way in which to astonish you before you left his Court!"

"Ah, no, indeed, I was coming to that also," replied Gentile. "It was during the course of an argument; for the Turk disputed perpetually with a kind of diabolical inspiration, whether he knew what he was arguing about or no, and although I remembered that somewhere the Romans had laid it down that it is better to remain silent in the presence of barbarians, being a Venetian, I suppose, and therefore nourished on the discourse of a hundred philosophers, I could not refrain from maintaining my point of view, forgetting that the disposition and manners of the Orientals make what seems incredible to us, quite orthodox for them? It was, then, during an argument one day that his Turkish Highness swore he would prove to me that, after a man's head is severed from his body, the neck retracts inside the cranium. I said that this was quite impossible, and contrary to the medical knowledge of our surgeons;

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

but, as usual, no argument of mine would serve; instead, a wretched slave was bundled into the royal presence and afterwards, before my very eyes, gentlemen, his head was tumbled off his shoulders by the crooked sword of one of the soldiers. 'Now, Venetian!' said that most royal Turk, 'Now, Master Italian! you shall observe the truth of what I say'; but, my good sirs," added the painter with dry humour, "before I had even recovered from my fit of sickness in beholding such a villainous spectacle, I had resolved to quit that savage despot's capital forever!"

Gentile Bellini sighed. "Ah, my friends! I entreat you to believe me," he continued, "when I say, first as a free Venetian, and then as a thinking, feeling human being, that I would not yield a corner of our most beloved Venice for all the golden splendour of those barbaric kingdoms. In the Turk's land, even the mountain peaks seem sharp and jagged like the blades of the ugly weapons they call scimitars; but in our dear land, we have in abundance all those mellowed prospects and luxuriant scenes in which my brother found so much delight; and also the gentle hills, those spheres of beauty and of grace from which our cherished friend, Messire Giovanni Battista da Conegliano received another name, the name of 'Cima' (the 'Summit'); for that is what the folk who followed after called him; because, they said, that with a certain skill and subtlety which he made his own, he always contrived to introduce the hill-tops of his native place into his paintings.

"And now, sir," he said earnestly, addressing Conegliano: "it is with respect and gratitude that I, for one, recall our long association and our friendship, when I look upon the solemnity of those masterpieces which belong to you alone. What lack of charity that any should say that you, the pupil of Aloise Vivarini, should have had anything to learn from two Venetian brothers, who admiring your art, as certainly they did, were not above learning a little of their own skill from you in the contemplation of your many secrets."

Conegliano's attenuated features shone with pleasure. For a moment he remained in silence, and then he said eagerly: "In Venice, as indeed in every place, you were known as brothers shining like the Dioscuri, both in equal splendour. The envy, which some have talked about, was already utterly disproved by the example you had set in honouring one another; and, as for malice itself and its base consequences, it could not enter into minds governed by a loyalty which I consider was but a noble portion of the open heart of our great city. We watched you, and we admired you. If some said that Messire Gentile was more subtle and more perfect in his composition, which though inclined to be natural, was at the same time controlled by an exquisite sense of balance and proportion; others would immediately reply that there was to be found in Messire Giovanni's art, alone, the true merging of atmosphere and harmony of colour; whereupon, it is very likely that the first group would instantly maintain that, as a draughtsman, Messire Gentile, possessed a finer feeling for line than any other Venetian of his century?"

"It seems to me," exclaimed Gentile Bellini, "that in so supposing, their presumption would be very wrong; indeed, I know only too well that my poor

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

skill needs little commendation, but with the regard to all the attributes of my dear brother; why, sirs, there was a development through him; there was a development as startling and as unexpected as was any prodigy that ever appeared before the eyes of seekers after truth. I can tell you that he began like any enthusiast, by taking up the new values of the Paduan school in company with the great Mantegna. Theirs was a friendship, I assure you, which certainly left its mark upon us all; for my brother's early paintings of 'The Transfiguration' and 'The Agony in the Garden' show the influence of that noble friend."

"It is true, all that you say is true," said Giovanni, rising to his feet. "Mantegna was certainly in my head; and Donatello too, whose works I had seen in Padua, and which stood before my ambitious thoughts like an ornamented screen; it was not easy, either," he added ruefully, "to break away from our late father's style, from the way he grouped his figures, and his formal compositions. I can tell you that it took me a long time to shake off the rigidity of all those Paduan conventions."

"But you did succeed," interrupted Conegliano, "even as I succeeded, in at last forming a style of your own, a style which, at the same time, was also regarded as essentially new and Venetian."

Giovanni nodded. "I had my summit, also, Messire Cima," he replied, "although I was willing to begin at the base; and that perhaps will explain the series of small devotional pictures which I painted; disregarding for the time those large decorative designs which seemed to have been the speciality of our family; and because of that, I think, that my name afterwards was very rarely to be found included in any correspondence with the State! I do not quite remember how old I was; but somewhere about the year 1470, I found myself at work on a large design of 'The Deluge' for the School of St. Mark; and then, at last, came my generously proportioned altar-piece of 'The Coronation of the Virgin' for the Church of St. Francesco. After that, I was considered even to be worthy of taking my brother's place while he was absent in the territories of the Turk," he concluded, smiling at Gentile.

"And without abating one jot of Messire Gentile's honourable title," cried Conegliano heartily, "those of us who saw what you had done in the Ducal Palace, marvelled at the result of so much labour, and we did not hesitate to say, at the time, that a new Master had arisen amongst us."

"To my cost," said Giovanni gravely, "I know I must have then achieved some sort of reputation. I painted 'The Adoration of the Child by the Virgin' for that most importunate of women, the Duchess of Mantua; and as if that was not enough, she would have persuaded me to undertake new scenes from the old Pagan mythology, despite the fact that I assured her such prostitution of my art was quite foreign to my nature."

"I suppose," he continued, gazing enquiringly at his brother, "it must have been much later that I at last conceived, and afterwards executed, my great design on the altar-piece at Pesavo; and from that time forward," he added, "what skill I possessed was appropriated by Bishops, Abbots and officials of the State. S. Giovanni and S. Paolo in our Venice—the Ducal Palace—the School

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

of S. Marco—all these absorbed my energies, and found a full scope for all my painting which, they said afterwards, was to be a perpetual influence on the art of Venice."

Giovanni sighed and settled his coat more firmly upon his shoulders. "But there were already rumours in the air of something new. Artist, Priest, Princess, Magistrate, were all crying out for novelty; all the crafts and students were off again, chasing the gilt butterfly, a new form, a new style. My young pupil, Giorgione, was among them, startling each new cloud of witnesses, thrilling all the chords of expectation in the City! I thought that I would be cunning with my age, and surprise them, pupils and admirers. I painted my altar-piece in the church of St. Zaccharias; it outdid the new style; it succeeded in out-Heroding Herod in my valiant Giorgione himself! As my brother here will admit, as a tribute to his genius I was persuaded to finish his great picture of 'St. Mark at Alexandria'. But, gentlemen, I regret to say that I was getting old. After my 'Madonna and Child' in the Dreva, and my farewell altar-piece in S. Giovanni Chrysostom, nothing much was heard of me, and I was surrounded by a crowd of imitators and critical young men; nevertheless, I felt content; content enough, indeed, to go to school again! The little I had done perhaps had not been done in vain? The State had honoured both my worthy father and my most cherished of brothers; and I, myself, too was honoured in having had such a father and such a brother. The name of Bellini had become a ladder by which young men with splendour in their vision might be able to ascend to hitherto unimagined heights; heights which warriors, like my own beloved Giorgione, could take suddenly by assault, to find a golden citadel upon the summit. Summit, once more, my dear friend Cima," Giovanni added kindly. "Yes, my good sirs, I was content in my way, content to know that the future was in the hands of young gods like Giorgione: 'prepare the way', they would cry, each one in his turn, and afterwards there would arise great lights in the sky—"Titian!" "

"Titian!" echoed a voice like a trumpet-call. "Titian! So we have done with pygmies at last!"

How the broad-shouldered owner of that powerful voice had managed to conceal himself among the company was something which I felt myself unable to understand? It was quite obvious by this time, however, that the part of patient brother which he had been content to accept for a while, was now at an end. As I turned to regard him, fascinated by the mere vocal power of the man, I saw that he had been sitting at some considerable distance from the rest of his compatriots; a person of consequence I thought, there could be no mistake about that, and one possessing a tremendous individuality; dignified and honoured, too, judging by the handsome folds of his garments. "Titian!" the room still echoed with the resounding syllables of that mighty name.

There the stranger stood, his arms extended, resembling in arrested movement the forelegs of a horse which has been reined in too violently; and then, in order to compel the attention of the astonished assembly, he struck both the palms of his hands together, making a noise like distant thunder.

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

I could see the Abbot's startled glance directed towards the stranger; like myself and many others, no doubt, he was questioning the identity of the emphatic guest, who could not refrain from calling out his mind before such an exalted company? As I let my own gaze wander freely, it came to rest upon the great bulk of the figure of the man, rising from the floor like a rocky eminence in the middle of a valley. The arrogant features which terminated at the chin in a sweeping grey beard, and the wrinkles stamped by wisdom across a lofty forehead, were strangely familiar to me. Although I knew this stranger was not Titian himself, yet there appeared to be some connection, some affinity, between him and the greatest of all the Venetian Painters.

With my eyes fixed on the magnificent figure of the stranger, I heard the Abbot's voice, calm once more, with its customary emphasis of grace: "I perceive, sir," he said, "that your words are prompted by some urgency? If it is possible to tell a man by the cut of his garments, you should belong to Italy?"

"No," answered the stranger with thinly veiled contempt: "where I come from we do not belong to anyone or any place, I assure you. Neither do I recognise this Italy. I am a citizen of Venice, the city of islands and lagoons, and the home of philosophers whose first allegiance is to the Kingdom of the Soul. You will recognise how difficult it has been for me to sit here patiently listening to men who talk of an Art which was but in its infancy; especially when such a quality as patience is entirely foreign to my nature; for I was born impatient! I have had to sit here hearkening to the opinions of skilful imitators; but when they dare to mention the name of Titian, then, as God is my witness, that name alone is my cue! I knew Titian. I worked with him, and we shared much honour and much favour together. But, until now," his eyes flashed over the table, "these Bellini have had all the say; is it to these men, Bellini, then, that the world must now repair for knowledge; they take but a lukewarm pleasure in beholding an ornamental and an imitation sun; but they are not warmed by these gilded rays; they are merely put in mind, through crude symbols, of the fountain-head of light, of Phœbus, the Creator—do you follow me?"

"I follow you, sir," replied Giovanni Bellini, vigorously. "I will answer you, and I say that even Titian himself could not present the sun, and the light of the sun, except through the common medium of such symbols."

"Stay, stay, sir, abate your warmth a little," answered the stranger vehemently. "You cannot talk of Titian, because you did not know him. If I say that I appeared some half a century after your time was already done, was that not to the good; does not the mathematician make his final computation at the foot of the column? So, so then, I will tell you what you are, you Bellini; for I am even acquainted with your father's painting of the 'Crucifixion' at Verona: fertility of invention, freedom, to a degree, I grant you; but nevertheless, you were waiting for that blast of fiery breath upon white dry shanks of bone—were you or your brother able to provide that warmth? Or was it kindled later, much later, after Giorgione, by Titian, or with Titian, or perhaps by me?"

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

"By you, sir!" exclaimed both the brothers in astonishment. "By you, sir!" echoed Conegliano. "But we do not even know who you are?"

"Be silent, you who are called 'Cima'," retorted the Stranger, "and know that there are many summits; many nameless peaks among the Apennines; but there is only one Olympus! And as for you, sirs," he continued, turning towards the brothers, who were staring at him in undisguised bewilderment, "let me deal with you more patiently than you deserve. You, sir, Messire Giovanni, are considered to be the member of your family with the tallest feather in your helm. I have seen your 'Baptismus' and your 'Virgins' and even the Bacchanals of Ferrara, which were reputed to be partly yours, and I can tell you that when you were able to forget Mantegna's rigid style, you were able to provide something new for the next century; something for Giorgione, for instance, to proceed with; something for Titian to carry to perfection; something for me; but although you were considered to be the great man of your house, it is to this Gentile here that some of us must ever remain grateful for bringing back from Byzantium those drawings and sketches which afterwards became the examples for many of our young Venetians. I tell you, sir," he continued imperiously, "that when I think of the name of Bellini, it is perhaps the 'Crucifixion' of your father which I remember first, or sometimes even Messire Gentile's 'Barbarossa' in the Ducal Palace. You will understand that I who painted the 'Crucifixion' in the S. Rocco exult in these imaginative concepts of man rather than in the delicate perfection of a little masterpiece! Because I worship immensity, the great project, the splendour in Heaven!"

"Tintoretto!" cried out several voices simultaneously.

"So! You acknowledge me at last," growled the stranger, shaking his huge shoulders like a bear. "While my nostrils were filled with the warm salt air of my magnificent city, I did not know these names of Francia and Perugino and the rest; they were, moreover, what many men call dead before my time began. I tell you, sirs," he cried, raising his voice, "it is only the little minds which patiently remember. We Venetians were too tremendous to waste our lives plodding along like overburdened beasts in the track of some aged idea, or some overloaded theory." He thumped down both his fists upon the table, until the burnished silver sprang from the plates and rattled against the glasses.

"Look at some of these painters, for instance," he demanded. "Quiet, poetic, small and patient. Bah! Some people's art is nothing but an exercise in self-discipline; and the poets who are among them do not turn out even creditable verse, but mere prose; nothing more than prose! It was we, citizens of the Republic of San Marco, alone, who knew how to make the senses leap, the limbs move, and the eye take its fill of the essential glory of the Holy Ghost of Colour!"

It now appeared to me, by observing the veins which stood out prominently on that forehead, wide as Jove's, and the vigorous nodding of the beard which might have sprung from the pugnacious chin of the prophet Ezekiel, that the speaker's method was to flog the attention of his audience rather than to invite it by the admirable quality of his discourse.



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

by Tintoretto

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

"Remember, my most excellent sirs," he continued, "that we Venetians were known to have descended from a hardy, sea-faring race, with the sea upon its very threshold. Everywhere, surrounding us, was the wonder of light upon broad waters, and the rising of the sun, and the setting of the moon, over the Grand Canal. Could any painter be alive and yet be unaware of these terrestrial glories of the earth and of the sky?"

"Yes, yes," he continued impatiently, "I will forestall the question which some of you are about to ask me. They called me Tintoretto, the 'little dyer', and it is by that name which most of you will surely remember me."

"Tintoretto! Tintoretto himself!" The whispered words still scurried across the table where all the painters were now grouped together.

Tintoretto nodded his powerful head. "Yes, you will see how a nickname sticks to one, and yet remains with more honour than any nobleman's title. My father was a dyer and was never ashamed of following his honourable trade. That was why 'Il Tintoretto' took the place of my real name of Jacopo Robusti. Tintoretto's name was the twin star which shone with that of Titian in the firmament of Fame. Ah! those days of long ago, of gleaming vats, and naked arms and shoulders of the dyers steeped in the imperial purple of the Cæsars and the scarlet of the concubines of King Solomon; the pools of gold and cinnamon and azure covering the floor like the carpets of the ancient Persians! I left them all behind when I was but a lad of seventeen summers and went as an apprentice to the studio of the redoubtable Tiziano, 'the greatest artist in the whole of Venice,' as my father used to say: 'Learn to imitate this venerable master and become as great as he, by the grace of God.' But, excellent sirs, I neither slavishly imitated Signor Vercellio, nor any other man! I painted by myself, for myself, and in my own way, because that is how one pleases God.

"I only stayed with my new master for about ten days, and because of that I know he said some hard things about me afterwards. And here is another strange thing, which you may believe if you choose. I tell you that this great Titian himself was jealous of me—of me, a mere pupil! Why should he have been afraid? There is an ancient saying: 'To every god his share of heaven'. So it was in our case. Titian could keep to his side, and I would be content to remain on mine. But in spite of all this foolish envy, which I failed to overcome, I was no sour cockle. Most of all I admired and studied the great achievements in painting of the mighty Titian, and the relief work of Michelangelo Buonarroti. I resolved to follow them, in so much as they could instruct me in the vital secrets of both form and colour. It must have been about this time that I wrote on the wall of my studio: 'Il disegno di Michelangelo, e il colorito dell Tizziano'. But that meant by no means that my design and my colour should be mere reflections of these two masters. No, they should instruct me, and initiate me, but through that instruction, it was possible, I believed, that I could transcend them!"

After a significant pause, Tintoretto flung out his long arm and pointed to a picture which hung immediately behind the Abbot's chair.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

"You will have observed my picture," he said imperiously, "The Raising of Lazarus! How did I contrive the bold chiaroscuro, you are going to ask me? Well, that is a connoisseur's question, but I will tell you all the same. I used artificial light, and this ensured a greater facility in dealing with objects in relief."

Perugino, who all this while had been gazing at the picture, now struggled to his feet and went over to examine the painting. Unheeding the interruption, Tintoretto went on speaking. "Yes," he said, smiling grimly to himself, "all our lives we kept people guessing, and because of that the question was always in everyone's mouth: 'Who is the greatest artist of Venice, Titian or Tintoretto?' No, no," he continued sharply, holding up an admonishing finger: "Let no one speak. No one could have answered that question, and I intend not to answer it now. But Titian was undoubtedly an unchallenged artist."

Before the echo of the resounding voice had died away, Lorenzo di Credi stole out of his chair and joined his friend who stood before the Venetian painter's canvas.

But Tintoretto had not finished. "Some of you may also ask me," he observed, "why it was that we Venetians excelled in the art of painting in oils. Think for a moment of our climate. It is warm and humid and is not very suitable for *buon fresco*, so we chose a medium more suitable, and used canvas rather than panels. There was much healthy rivalry between us, too, I can assure you, in this new creative sphere.

"I will tell you about the time when Paolo Veronese, Lippi, and the rest, as well as myself, were commissioned to prepare designs for a panel in the ceiling of the Sala Dell Albergo at San Rocco. I knew at once what I would do. I took careful measurements of the place the paintings were to occupy, and, while the others were busy considering their cartoons, I, always quick to seize upon an idea and carry it through (a characteristic which, I may say in passing, had earned me another nickname, that of 'Il Furioso')—made the finished designs in a fraction of the allotted time, and set them in position, secretly. When the judges called us together to hear their decision, they found to their surprise that my composition was not only finished but already in its place. That was not what they asked for, they said; but I replied that that was the only way I knew of preparing the designs. I told them that if they did not want to pay me for them they could keep the work as a gift; and I said this because I knew well that by the law of their foundation they were not permitted to refuse any gift offered to them. So they let my work remain, and there it stayed to my last knowledge."

As Perugino and his friend returned to their seats at the table, an enquiring voice was raised to address the fiery speaker:

"Tell us, then, worthy artist, how did you achieve such a vivid mass of form and brilliance of light contrasted against shade, as we see in this picture now before us?" The Venetian turned to face Philippe de Champaigne, the seventeenth-century apostle of realism, with an interest he did not attempt to disguise.

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

"I see, sir, that you are a man of enquiring mind, a man, I should say, of perfect understanding," he added condescendingly. "Many painters have striven to affect these qualities, but most of them have failed. I succeeded because I was gifted. It was really quite simple," he proceeded, "and I hit upon a trick while I was still a lad. In studying the sculptures of Michelangelo, I used to model my subjects in wax and then set them in a box, just as we do the figures in a shadow-show. Then I would light a candle and set it in position, so that I could paint not only the forms of the figures, but also reproduce the natural shadows as they fell, in order to give them that resemblance to life."

"But surely," broke in Antoine Watteau, "surely you did not model all the figures in your 'Last Judgment', the mightiest picture of its kind that was ever painted?"

"No, of course not," replied Tintoretto impatiently, "because by that time I had long passed the need of such artificial aid. I was at the height of my powers. I had almost completed my life's work, for I had filled the Scuola San Rocco with so many paintings that men began to say in jest that it had been especially built for me as my great studio! Although the 'Last Judgment', with its more than seven hundred figures, was, I admit, an astounding piece of work, the San Rocco was my especial pride. No other work inspired me as my work in that place inspired me!"

It was after a moment's silence that François Boucher, coughing a trifle nervously, I thought, became bold enough to address this stormy giant of a Tintoretto. "My great Master," he said, "I also speak for all the painters who followed you, and I know that there is not one among them who would not offer up their worship to you in that same San Rocco which we loved above all other places, and which by the very title of your genius you could claim as your own Temple. Nevertheless," he added, in a quiet voice, "when I think of your vast achievement, it is not always of such works as the 'Last Judgment', stupendous though it is and sufficient to steal away the wits of any smaller artist; no, it is rather of the glory of the 'Crucifixion' and the imagination of a God which lay behind it, that has held me spellbound, a masterpiece which I beheld again and again. There surely is accumulated all the strange, surpassing beauty which alone belonged to Signor Tintoretto, the mightiest painter in the world."

"I, too, in spirit, have knelt in awe before that 'Crucifixion'," ventured Fragonard in a humble voice, "and I shall never forget its mysterious silver light streaming down from the cross, seeming in its descent to redeem all the iniquity of the darkened city."

"And above all, the lovely figure on the cross, standing out against the sky," murmured Watteau, shaking his head.

Tintoretto made no reply, except for a slight inclination of his head; but, turning from the Venetians, to everyone's surprise he pointed with his finger towards his picture which hung behind the Abbot's chair. "This picture which you now see before you. It is small in size for my work. I painted it for a friend, who might have called himself a patron had he dared," he added loftily. "I

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

suppose it must have been some time in the year 1573 when he came to me and asked me if I would paint this picture and another for him; one was to be 'The Raising of Lazarus' and the other some episode in 'The Life of Moses'. I remember I detested the manner in which he made both these suggestions. In fact," said Tintoretto, "the way he spoke about the pictures was positively laughable if it had not been so exasperating—the ape! He had the impudence, too, if you please, to attempt to trade upon my reputation for rapid execution. He actually insisted upon a clause to be inserted in our contract, whereby it was stated that if both pictures were not completed in two months' time, he would refuse to take them at all! Ha! But I was too proud, and too confident of my own powers to treat him as he really deserved! I signed that document, gentlemen; and by the time agreed upon, he had his two pictures delivered to him in perfect order. By the Splendour of God! I let it be seen that 'Il Furioso' could keep his word!"

A fierce light gleamed for an instant in his ancient eyes; then, immediately, their look softened as once more he gazed at the picture he had painted nearly four hundred years ago.

"'The Raising of Lazarus'," said Cima da Conegliano humbly. "Was there ever chosen a subject so divine; so gloriously fulfilled; so ineffably triumphant?" Filled with the power of his enthusiasm, his voice rose to a bold assurance. "Signor Tintoretto, give me leave to say what I dare say now; for I dare affirm, gentlemen, from the sight of this one picture of his, that this great master who stands here before us, raised the art of painting in Venice immeasurably. This mighty man among us poured out of his own heart new life into corporal elements which without doubt must otherwise have sunk into dissolution."

"Amen," whispered Tintoretto, with a smile, while still gazing at his picture, where the secret colours glowed, terrible, like the embered heart within a fire of coals.

As Tintoretto's deep-toned "Amen" died away, I noticed that certain of his fellow-painters were casting looks of stern disapproval in his direction, as well they might, for he had dealt with them more harshly than they had expected, or deserved.

I especially noted a fierce, challenging look in the eye of the sensitive and self-confident Perugino, who rose to his feet and, after bowing to the Abbot and again to his brother-painters, addressed himself to Tintoretto, taking up the cudgels on behalf of his less belligerent brethren.

"I feel, brother, that your criticism upon us, the painters who lived and laboured before you, is undeserved as it is ungenerous. It lacks that sense of justice which I should have thought would have characterised a great and venerable painter like yourself. For you should know that, in his upward progress, man moves slowly, step by step, towards greatness of achievement, and never achieves perfection; for perfection is of God—not of man.

"You, sir, of whom I could know nothing, for Time did not allow it, were called (so I have just been told) the Michelangelo of Venice. You would seem to

CONEGLIANO—THE BELLINI—TINTORETTO

possess not a little of Buonarroti's proud and envious nature, else you would not so harshly belittle the great Florentines. Your own Jacopo Bellini and after him his two sons, Gentile and Giovanni, could not have been the artists they were, but for the Florentine Gentile da Fabriano, who worked, as you may remember, in the Doge's Palace at Venice. Again your talented citizen Domenico Veneziano got all that is great in his art from the city on the Arno. Did you not yourself learn the tricks of your chiaroscuro from a study of Florentine art? And were you not strongly influenced by the works of the greatest of the Florentines—Michelangelo?

"But I need not labour these or similar points for it seems to me that these past masters of the Florentine school—Di Credi, Francia, whom we have with us, were noble painters, much to be commended—though they did not make such a song about their achievement as Tintoretto."

A buzz of excitement went round among the painters, for they were glad to find that the man who had known the divine Raphael was not afraid to hit hard and to the point.

"I can believe that your own tempestuous power, your own riot of colouring, your feverish and somewhat theatrical composition was an intoxication—and the intoxicated have little patience with the sober."

And again there were murmurs of appreciation and bravos upon this further thrust at the illustrious but boastful son of Venice.

"It was all part of your pagan love of lustiness, your Venetian robustness; but strength is not everything; and restless movement may weary the eye even as it does the body. And had not Michelangelo strength—and to spare?"

"These Florentines, whom you affect to despise, knew better than to rely solely upon virtuosity. They were apostles of a higher vision—a vision of peace and inspiration of soul—preachers of a gospel of serenity. How should *il Furioso* understand them? They were of a different world—perhaps a better world—a world of transcendent, restful beauty. Their works reflected the quiet, contemplative spirit which at its core was the reverse of virtuosity. Even the volcanic Buonarroti charmed his colossal creations into an awful calm.

"You in your own day were advanced above the rest—so were they in theirs. That you had the advantage of the pagan giant Titian as a rival, that you lived in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Queen of the Adriatic are no excuses for such destructive criticism as yours. The most profound criticism is that which is tempered by the wisdom of toleration."

Tintoretto sat calmly through this spirited championship of the Florentines. He made no attempt, while Perugino was speaking, to counter the passionate counter-blow he had received, and, while murmurs of applause filled in the silence, he merely drummed with his fingers upon the table before him, impatient as ever—but for once inarticulate.

Gradually the essential wisdom of the man subdued the pride which urged him to further retort, and it was with an air of indescribable dignity and majesty that he rose and bowed to Perugino, who, visibly touched by the Venetian's gesture of generosity, returned the salutation.

CHAPTER VIII

JEANNE D'ARC

I MUST here break off in order to comment on a most extraordinary happening. I say "extraordinary", for my dream had developed in a smooth and regular pattern, and untoward happenings, even in a dream, are disturbing.

Among the many treasures I am proud to possess, there is a ring, a simple little thing of silver. The value of the metal therein may be rather less than sixpence. But it has an established historic value, for it is the one ring of its kind in the world—the ring of Jeanne d'Arc.

The bezel of this little ring has an area sufficient for the engraving of the revered monogram *IHS*, while the shoulders bear, on one side, the letter "M", and on the other "J". This is the ring which St. Jeanne d'Arc wore throughout her inspired conflict with the forces of England during the closing stages of the "Hundred Years' War." My fancy had played with the association of the little circle of silver with a former Prince of the Church, Henry Beaufort, who, it is authoritatively stated, gave the ring to Henry VI of England.

But I had almost forgotten about this relic of St. Jeanne. As a matter of fact, I had placed it together with more ambitious *objets d'art* on a table in the lounge. Hence I was not a little surprised to see that it was now held upright on a little dais of cardinal red in the middle of my stout refectory table. Normally its physical insignificance would not have made the little ring obvious anywhere; but with a feeling of uneasiness I saw now that it was far from insignificant. Silver cannot glow, or sparkle of itself. Yet, as I looked and wondered, the ring began to glow as if it was centred in a mist of radiant light—an inherency of light. This slowly became as a nimbus, yet something different, for now the glow was not *above* the ring, but the ring was *couched* within it; yet was it not obscured by the rich cardinal-red light; and I beheld the base of that red turn to deeper reds—pyrrhous and profane, as human blood is profane in the presentation of suffering saintship.

I was afraid . . . horribly afraid! I seemed to be standing on the edge of a fearful precipice in the depths of which lay the uttermost realm of darkness! I waited trembling for the coming of a wind to strike me, as it might be the blow of a mailed fist . . . when this should come I feared I should be flung headlong into depths unfathomed and unfathomable! I felt myself lured forward. Then I wrenched my body from that unseen grip and fell back—to safety. I knew that the inert, physical part of *me* lying in the chair in the lounge was suffering; for beads of sweat stood out and ran from the brow, and the features

JEANNE D'ARC

took on a strained contortion. Little did it assuage my fear to know that *he*, too, suffered, for the instancy of action was forced upon me.

This instancy flung that retiring *me* from the shadows. I rushed to a gap in the seating at the table, leant over and grasped this fearful emblem of primitive savagery which had welled up and about the relic, than which none is more sacred to the Church and to all good Frenchmen in the Faith. I tore it from its place and plunged my hand, as in living flame, to rescue the precious circle from the profanity which, like a cloud, environed it! I drew back in triumph: my hands were empty and there before me, in the sinister glow of a triumph that, in itself, was a mockery of my impotence, lay the emblem of a holocaust—not a holocaust of the past, but a *holocaust to be*! One or two of my “guests” had become aware of the ring, and one of them took it in his hand and held it up to the light.

Who started the ensuing hand-to-hand trail of the ring—a trail which was to end in the hands of the Abbot, I cannot tell; but for me, the moments were moments of agony. I struck at each one that grasped it, I wrenched at their arms; I hammered with clenched fist on breast and head! . . . I did all these futilities; yet did them not. . . . I flung myself on my knees and cried: “No, no! Beware! For the sweet love of Christ . . . beware! The blood of all the saints in Heaven be on the head of him who suffereth the ring to pass into the hands of a French priest upon this soil of red England! Would you burn anew the sacred flesh of the Saint whose effigy is a living presence in the very heart of France!”

“O holy man of God, touch not the ring—the Ring of the Maid! . . . for in the risen glory of Beatitude there is the trail and wake of flame and agony on earth!”

Fearfully, I saw the genial Abbot turn to his neighbour and hold out an upturned palm; for that neighbour held the Ring of the Maid in his fingers. It seemed to me in my terror that Time’s march had frozen in its tracks! Every figure in the room, save the Abbot and his smiling neighbour, had lost movement and the desire for movement; they were as fixed and motionless as plastic figures of wax; as though my fear had at last filtered through into their “consciousness”. My mood of abandoned dread was the expectancy of a cataclysm; the roar and rage of heavenly artillery—thunder and lightning; the quake of violently disrupted and sundered earth; the shrieks and clamour of the damned; the rending of the Curtain to disclose the presence and purpose of an awful doom—a judgment before the Judgment!

The next I knew was a moment of intense darkness; as though I had swooned. Then from the darkness a picture emerged. I saw a prison cell, with a barred window and a grated door. No light burned within the cell; but the strong glow of a full moon looked in through the bars of the high window, the angle of light falling upon a wooden bed at the head of which were blankets neatly folded. Upon this bed sat a young woman dressed in black from head to foot—dressed as a man, with tight fitting hose upon her maiden legs. Her face in the moonlight kept the pallor of the moon and was raised as in greeting to the tender light.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

I saw that her hair was abundant, dark, and cut short. Her eyes were amazing in that glow from without—large, wide apart, dreamy-deep and unfathomable in expression. Surely the face of a saint—a saint if not *in* Heaven, yet none the less *of* Heaven in all purity and innocence.

There was a grating in the door and a sudden light flung its pattern against the opposite wall. A man's eyes looked through into the little cell and were for a moment fixed on the inert figure on the bed. This maid in youth's attire did not move; for the interruption had no power to disturb her thoughts. Then I heard a peremptory command. The door opened; a strongly-built man in the plain garb of a priest—black cassock and cloak—entered and thrust the torch which he carried within a ring on the wall. The door clanged behind him and the sliding panel beyond the grating shut. The priest stood with his back to the door and stared searchingly at the maid who remained with her face uplifted in the moonlight. Slowly she turned her head and looked up at him. She sighed wearily, as though the sight of a priest's cassock meant to her fresh depths of weariness, vain repetitions, and rose—a statue in funeral black crowned by a fair, white face. The priest raised his hand and made the Sign of the Cross. The maid's great eyes darkened as though an actual shadow had sped across them.

"Good father, it is in my mind to pray that you should torture my body more and my mind less. I have naught to answer to prevent what is about to be fulfilled. If I am to die; let me die in peace. Dear God, I am weary of life."

"Poor child; I am none of your judges—torturers if you deem them so." At the deep tones of the priest's voice the girlish face looked for a moment startled; and then she smiled with the innocence of a child relieved of apprehensions. She took a step towards him and I heard the clank of chains . . . the helpless maid was manacled.

"I feared the coming of him who will have my unhappy body to torture at the stake . . . because God keeps my soul from him." The priest went to her and took her manacled hands in his, and the moon showed him as no enemy, at least for that moment, for tears were in his eyes. "Cauchon," she murmured under her breath, "he means my death. . . . My judges—it is said of them that they make a kennelling of mastiffs and bloodhounds to the harassment of a kitten. Am I so much a kitten?"

"Nay, my Jeanne, thou'rt a lioness in the pelt of a shorn lamb——"

"To whom God tempereth the wind," she countered, with the flash of a smile; then added: "He hath said of this kind: 'Feed my lambs'." The priest also smiled; but he shook his head, gently; as at the irrepressible playfulness of a child, yet one whose spirit no harrowing could quell.

"Jeanne—daughter in God; I see you do not know me . . . one you would class as an enemy, because I am in the enemy's camp. But, before God, I am no enemy—no protagonist in the torture of a gentle maid." He paused and coughed, as one does to hide emotion. "I am Henry Beaufort!"

The maid's face lit up with joy. Manacled as she was, in a moment she was on her knees; her head bowed as does one who, wordlessly, entreates a blessing.

"*Eminentissimo!*" she breathed. The great English Cardinal made the Sign of

JEANNE D'ARC

the Cross above her and his strong hands descended to rest for a moment in blessing on that bowed head.

"God protect and for ever bless thee, Jeanne d'Arc; for truly in the sight of God art thou high in the realm of martyrdom. In the sight of Man thou art twofold; in the sight of England's soldiers and the French theologians for ever damned; in the sight of true France, a saviour in her hour of need."

"And to you, holy father in God?" The sweet untroubled voice hung on the air like the echo of a silver bell. It was an innocent and direct question: so typical of Jeanne, where another had been merely humble and afeared to embarrass an exalted personage. The Cardinal's noble face was troubled. Absurd as the feeling was in the vast difference of their respective states, he knew himself as one who stood at test—a test wherein there was room neither for the subtleties of the theologian nor for the evasions of the politician. It was an appeal to manhood—that purer manhood from which the earthly virtues are inseparable. He looked round the cell, and, with the innate caution of one who knows every trick and gin in the category of ruthlessness and treachery, lowered his voice, so that it was little above a whisper. As he spoke he raised her to her feet.

"To me . . . thou'rt a maid, pure and undefiled. The instrument of unseen powers of eternal good—and something more . . . a mighty genius whose destiny it is to sway the hearts of men; one born to inspire the ignorant and brutal with humility and love. This rabble soldiery of France—nay, France herself, whose shining face hath been for decades as watershed and runnels for her tears . . . you, a simple maid—a child—have dried those tears and turned her face to the sun! 'Tis a miracle, my Jeanne, the like of which is not in the history of Christendom." As the Cardinal spoke, his voice deep with emotion, she looked at him, calmly, critically—testing, ever testing, every word for its value in the concept of sincerity and truth; for little cause had she to trust the ecclesiastical word. Then the memory of countless treacheries and betrayals fell from her and she looked at him with shining eyes and said, in sweet simplicity:

"How should a poor maid doubt the kindly words of a sovereign prince of Rome?" Henry Beaufort, deeply moved, placed his hands for a moment, palms together; then parted them and with them framed her shining face. He bent and kissed her broad, white brow. Jeanne's look was an ecstasy . . . it was as though the cloak of her wrongs, her distrust of men—all men—her desolation and the despair that at times thrust so poignantly through her faith, had fallen from her. Beaufort turned his head aside, as though in shame of his emotions. She sensed his unhappiness.

"It does not matter, my lord. Sorrow not for me. Doth not God, All-high and All-merciful, chasten those whom he hath promised to love?" She paused, thought for a moment, then added, "Hath He not spoken to me through St. Michael and St. Catherine, and shall I not believe?" Then the tone of her sweet voice changed and the question came direct and faintly authoritative: "But you have a mission, my lord—a question . . . a—a something that is not for Jeanne the martyr, but for Jeanne, the maid of Domremy . . . where the

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

sun shines and the winds of May whisper in the old branches of the Fairy Tree
—*l'arbre Fée de Bourlemont*—”

“How should'st thou know aught of a mission?” said the Cardinal, sharply.
“It is true—”

“My *Voices* told me that a man of God—a *good* man of God,” explained the maid naïvely, “would come and that he would bring me a message . . . or, mayhap not a message; but something from Domremy. I did doubt me of a message so brought; but I was wrong to doubt. You, my lord, are come.” The Cardinal nodded, though his expression was troubled. The searching and refined intellect of highly-placed churchmen even in those days of mysticism, or superstition, made them loath to accept *in their hearts* manifestations which were outside their own experience, unless the proof were untrammelled and convincing. Was the analytical and cold intellect of the wordly Cardinal convinced that Jeanne's “voices” were direct manifestations from on High, untainted by the intrusion of the prideful self? He knew that Faith alone could achieve astounding results . . . yet here was this maid of Domremy calmly telling him that his secret visit and more secret mission were known to her. He was shaken in his natural materiality; for should he prove one of her “experiences”, then, in logic, must he believe all. But honest Jeanne could not know of the clash of faith and intellect at strife within the mind of the great yet worldly churchman. He said, gently, as one speaking to a child:

“Your *Voices* have warned you aright, Jeanne. This is my mission: in the sitting of the Court yesterday you demanded”—he smiled at the idea of this child “demanding” anything of her forty-two judges—“you demanded that the two rings taken from you in captivity should be restored. You did say that the Burgundians have the one inscribed —*Jesu* and *Marie*, which was given to you by your father and mother. The other is held by Bishop Cauchon.”

“That is so, my lord. I asked for the gift of my brother; a plain little ring of silver. If they will not give it to me, then let them give it to the Church.”

“But, my child, you are wrong. Your brother's ring is held by the Burgundians and the silver ring, which hath the initials for *Jesu hominum salvator* and, on its shoulders, on the one side, ‘J’, and on the other ‘M’, is . . . here.” He held out a little circlet of silver. It was as he said regarding the inscriptions. Jeanne took the ring from him and held it to the light.

“The same,” she murmured, while tears gathered in her eyes. “It is the same—my little ring.” Then she turned to him. “Heaven bless you, my lord of Rome; for you have done a good deed this day.” Then her brow grew heavy with thought. “But he who would hound me to my death held it. They, my judges, thought to damage my faith with this ring . . . alleged that I had wrought enchantments and conjured devils in its name. Ah, me; my little ring to do these evils—out of the base minds of men —!”

“Be not afraid, Jeanne; the ring is mine. How it came about that it is mine does not matter.” The smile of the great Cardinal was nothing if not grim and worldly. “That it is mine means that it is yours. But it were well that you should hide it; and,” he added with diffidence strange in a dominating

JEANNE D'ARC

personality, "it were well, for my sake—for the sake of Henry of England—that my part in this giving be not known."

"They shall tear my poor body in pieces and burn me at the stake, my lord, before such betrayal should come to pass." It was veritably Jeanne, the fighting Maid of France, who spoke, for her fine eyes flashed and her tender mouth set in a hard line. The Cardinal stared at her as if yet another phase of her being was revealed to him.

"I believe you, Jeanne. You would spare even your enemy—preserve his honour with your own dragged to the dust. It is what I expected." Jeanne nodded, as if at an obvious statement of fact.

"Tell me, I pray you, my lord," she said, quietly, "how is it with this King of England? They do speak of him as a fool and a nothing and the tool of the strong English barons and lords."

"He is none of these things, Jeanne; except that he is indeed torn between the factions of our rival houses. Tool, is he not; neither to one nor to the other; for he would be solely the instrument of God. He is good and pure and loveth God with a great love. He hateth cruelty and feareth the ways of the world, wherein men are for ever in conflict. But, alas; he, a man, were a king in all that makes a king had he the gifts and powers which it hath pleased God to plant within the brave heart of a maid——"

"This is some English maid, my lord?" Jeanne asked, with a bright interest and innocence. "Shall she not inspire the heart of this good king ——?"

"Nay, Jeanne; that she cannot do. For she is the Maid of France—a recusant, ungrateful France; but, for her, the Maid, forever France."

"Your King of England—the sworn enemy of France—thinks this of a French maid! What unkindness I have done to him in the name of France! And yet—yet he can forgive! Oh, my lord, thou bringest balm to my wounds. I shall pray for this sweet king of yours—this Henry." And, after a pause: "Were it not well, my lord Cardinal of Rome, that Henry of England should remember this Jeanne by some token of remembrance—not as an enemy, but as one with his royal self in the sight of God?"

"It were indeed well, Jeanne," said my lord Beaufort, gently. She held out the little ring to him; then drew it back, kissed it and offered it anew.

"Give this good Henry of England my ring and pray him in his knighthood of Christ to keep it . . . thus will he know, when the Maid is gone, that the enmity of France and England shall be banished to Hell whence it came and the unity of the two yet make them as one when the enemy shouteth and the dogs of war are loosed. Do this for me, my lord, in the name of God, and it shall be well." . . .

* * * * *

I was in Rouen, one of a vast crowd of human beings, troubled, unhappy, restless as an on-thrusting wave among fast-anchored rocks; a wave in search of peace and indivisibility, yet chopped and broken; where insweeping waves climb, unheeding, on the backs of their fellows, crying for room where no room

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

is. Among the throng there were those who did not kneel: the strong, merciless, soldiers of England. They stood as a living wall along the route of the passing martyr—a wall of steel welded in the ferocities of the wild beast which can only understand its fear and seeks to lay the ghost of the unaccountable forever in the maw of Death. Yet there were tender hearts even here; for, when the girl's head sank on her breast in the agony of death, a plain English soldier cried aloud: "Jesu! We are lost . . . we thought to destroy a witch; we have burned a saint!"

CHAPTER IX

THE MASTER OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ALTAR

I FEARED I might have missed something in the seemingly long hours of my transportation to Rouen. I need not have feared, however, for though I had journeyed far and seemed to have contacted time at many points, my dining-hall flashed back vividly on my perception—by “perception” I mean the conscious self behind the mind; for unless there be a consciousness separate from the voluntary workings of the mind, how otherwise should I be able to record those workings. I had forgotten that in the dream-state there is no such concept as time; and I had returned in the very moment when I had left; though it is, of course, absurd to speak of “moments” in connection with a dream. I found with no surprise that the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew was speaking in his harsh Germanic voice.

Ignoring the impetuous oration of Tintoretto, and Perugino's spirited reply; passing back beyond the discourses of Conegliano and the Bellini; he fastened upon a phrase of Francesco Francia's which had evidently given him occasion for deep thought. The storm of controversy had raged around him unheeded, and it was to the symbol of loveliness which haunted him that he returned.

“I have not fully understood, perhaps, our friend Francesco Francia's allusion to the Rose. Is it because I have never been in love with any Woman? However, the Rose with me, as with many painters was ever a symbol of the elusive Spirit of Beauty, to capture which is, has been, and will ever be, the aim of those who labour in the sacred name of Art. Meister Perugino here, at least, will know I speak the truth in saying that even in his time there were painters who laboured to translate the spirit of the Rose into the permanence of paint. Was there not in Italy one, Philippino Lippi, the son of that strange and wandering soul, Fra Lippo Lippi, who painted a radiantly lovely Madonna and Child against the background of a garden trellised and embowered with roses? Was not another such Bernadino Luini? A further lover of the Rose in his art was Martin Schongauer of Kallenbach. . . . Ah, me; ‘Handsome Martin’ we used to call him! Who upon earth, aye, or in heaven, itself, does not know ‘Handsome Martin’s’ exquisite ‘Virgin of the Rose Bower’ which he painted for the Church of St. Martin at Kolmar?

“If I might speak of my own work, I would admit that I found the art of Martin Schongauer a constant source of inspiration. And you, Meister Perugino, you should know much of our ‘Handsome Martin’ if I am not mistaken. Had you not the privilege of an intimate friendship with him?”

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

Perugino detached himself from the group of artists with whom he was conversing.

"Martin Schongauer?" said he. "Veritably 'Handsome Martin' as you have said, for with his noble features, his rambling curls and his princely air, was he not a man amongst men—and women, of course! Ah, the ladies—the gift of all gifts from a merciful and all-seeing Deity! Women worshipped my friend; for he was indeed my friend in all that makes and keeps friendship the precious bond it is between man and man. But what is the worship of women—that adoration of one man, centred, as it were, in a constantly changing phantasmagoria of feminine temperament . . . what is its aim and end? Is it just the antithesis of friendship, the enemy of creative imagination? Does it not undermine that other love of that fair and jealous mistress, Art, who gives so little, asks so much and is supreme in her possessiveness! Well, well!" Perugino shook his head in reminiscence, as the wise man who in life's experience has well maintained the balance between the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit.

"You are all doubtless little interested in the women of my life, or in the fair conquests which fell so easily to our Martin. Yes, my friends, the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew is right; the great—the incomparable Schongauer was my intimate and well-loved companion and, as a fellow-artist, at once an inspiration and a critical guide. Mark you, not all the field of criticism was his; for oft have I wrangled with him about a line, or tint; but never in bitterness or in jealousy. I would give him my latest drawings and he would send me some parallel achievements of his own; and so we learned one from another in love and understanding. Of the difficult and delicate art of engraving he, in his time, was a master, and his name was famous throughout all Italy. You, oh, venerable Master," with a wave of his hand towards the old man, "unless I am very wrong in my surmise, profited from the study of his clever designs as I myself did.

"Now, my lord Abbot," insinuated Perugino, with a twinkle in his dark eyes, "the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew has enticed us forward to amuse the company; yet he, himself, in that modesty of which he has made a veritable cloak, retires behind the screen of Perugino and, I imagine, the screen of others to come, thereby designing to retire still further into a region as subtle and subdued as the backgrounds of his own paintings." This little thrust at the venerable artist was met by broad smiles from those of his fellow artists who knew his work. The Abbot rose and extended a hand to quell the ripple of mirth.

"Indeed," he said, "Perugino's reminder of the Master's modesty is timely. He shall not keep the kernel of that great knowledge of Art which is his within the husk of retirement. If, in my appreciation of his work, he will permit me to make a few preparatory remarks, then am I persuaded that he, in his courtesy, will not refuse us.

"Know, my friends, that this modest man was in his day the greatest master of the early School of Cologne. His reputation was earned not by genius alone,

THE MASTER OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ALTAR

but by genius allied with the severest constraints of work and study; and with this contributory factor to be borne in mind—that he ever had, and kept, one objective in mind—the purest development of Germanic thought and feeling. I am one who has known the work of the great artists, and I have been wondering at the difficulty there is in differentiating the many schools, the diversity of individual masters, especially in the widespread art of painting. In the lifetime of this venerable man the attractions, I understand, of the Italian and Netherlandish painters were so powerful as to draw many from other lands and other schools to these founts of inspiration and technique. But the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew eschewed foreign influences and remained true to his pre-destined walk in the broad fields of Art. My friends, I now call upon this most distinguished of all the Rhenish painters—a man whose personality set the seal of greatness on the production of an entire century of Teutonic Art—to favour us with a few words.”

There was a murmur of applause from the company and frowns disappeared from brows which had formerly been darkened in disagreement.

“My dear friends and fellow-artists,” began the old man, “our esteemed champion of the Church has, as he threatened, couched his ‘few preparatory remarks’ in terms of appreciation. He is kind—very kind—and, indeed, I were a churl to lack response in act and feeling to his appreciation; which, to me, seems too definite, too assured . . . there were so many fine workmen of my day.” He paused, and murmurs of encouragement were heard. He then proceeded:

“During the later years of the fifteenth century I was a young lay-brother of the famous Monastery of the Reichenau in the Untersee, on the borders of Swabia. In those days the wide domains of the Duchy of Swabia still stretched to the shores of the Bodensee—the Lake of Constance, as it is now called; but the ancient power of the Duchy had gone and it had become no more than a State of Southern Germany. In the tenth century, however, Swabia had been a domain of extent and power. Within its jurisdiction stood two monuments to the temporal dominance of the Church; the Monastery of the Reichenau and the Monastery of St. Gall. The latter was a powerful rival of the Reichenau, and it has been said that no love was lost between them. In my time on earth, our Monastery had already maintained its place in history from the eighth century onwards, and, as I said, it was still flourishing in the fifteenth century. During this long period of time St. Gall, famous for many decades as a seat of learning and of the arts, had fallen upon evil days following the disastrous incursions of the barbaric Huns, and had been for many years little more than a heap of ruins of tragic memory.

“Nevertheless, the tradition of our rival’s greatness lived on, and we of the younger brethren lent willing ears to many a tale of the days when St. Gall was a power in the land. We were admonished in the salutary story of Notker the Stutterer; a goodly monk of much learning who, despite his reputation and usefulness in the scriptorium, was condemned to water a dead apple-tree in the cloister garden for a whole year in order that his pride of spirit should be

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

chastened. Then there was the story of the old Irish monk who, between the pious words of a holy tome which he was illuminating, was moved by the Devil to insert in his barbarous Gaelic such unseemly ejaculations as 'Thank God, another page done', and similar profane remarks, suggesting the square peg in a round hole, as they say. Fortunate it was for him that the good German monks knew nothing of the Gaelic, nor of the mind of this cold reprobate to say nothing of the leprechawns, imps and satyrs of his native Ireland.

"But the prime favourite with us all was the tragic story of the young novice and poet who was banished to the gloom of a solitary cell high up in the Hagenau—because, forsooth, he had fallen in love; and with no less an one than the Duchess of Swabia, herself. And she? Alas, loved him! It was said of this unhappy youth that so great was the strife for his soul between the Church and the legion of devils which nightly stoked the fires of his passion for the sweet and stately but, alas, vulnerable Duchess, that my lord Abbot allotted to him a brother-band of monks to pray for him and a great bell wherewith to demand their prayers when the stoking of the Devil should surpass the bounds of human endurance. Alas, and alas for the frailty of man *and* woman! The nights of the unfortunate brother-band were made hideous by the almost constant clanging of the great bell. Tired in body and soul with the long, long day of work and prayer, they would seek their grey cells and truckle-beds and instantly sink into the bosom of the particular angel, or saint, whom most they favoured with their orisons. But the curtain of sleep would be rent and angel and saint be wafted heavenwards with the bounding of the monks from their beds and their rush to the chapel to pray, and pray, and pray, with the furious clanging of the tolling bell drowning their beseechings and causing fearful elisions and hiatuses in their monkish Latin! Gradually, the tolling of the bell would cease and the poor monks would go staggering back to their hard couches, once more to seek the bosoms of their angels and saints. Yet hardly had they stretched themselves in thankful repose than the clangour of the bell would start again; and so on, all through the night. When the good Abbot visited the Hagenau after some weeks he was horrified at what he saw. The sinner was fat and rosy—he slept in his solitary cell throughout the day; but the brother-band were skeletons one and all, with dulled eyes far sunk in their eye-pits, so that the Abbot, who had the inner vision of a Man of God, was sure he caught sight of the grisly phantom of Death vanishing by the cloister door—as might be expected both of Death and of the Devil when the earthly dispenser of heavenly benefits walks abroad.

"We were not told the sequel, if sequel there was. But one amongst us found that the Devil, tiring of conflict before the untiring efforts of the Church, one night lent a hand on the bell-rope which the sinner was pulling. Then, they say, the Devil changed the clapper of the bell to a fox's tail; because the bell rung harder indeed than ever, but soundlessly. Thus the monks at last had a good night's repose, as, for once, was the case with the sinner; for by agency of the Devil, certainly not of any of the good monks, he, the sinner, was found hanging high in the air with the bell-rope round his neck. Who shall blame the



THE NATIVITY

by the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew

Triptych

THE MASTER OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ALTAR

good monks if, so seeing, they fell on their knees in grateful utterance of prayer. *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes!*"

Here let me interrupt the discourse of the Master, who had dealt with the stories of St. Gall with a gravity which was most incongruous considering the subject and the language used. I remembered the levity and frequent obscenity of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; particularly in France and Italy, in which even monks of literary trend were wont to jeer at the churchmen and nobles of their time. But the good Abbot was of an earlier time, and I feared lest the innocent and engaging frankness of the Master should draw forth his condemnation. My astonishment can therefore be imagined when I saw his whole body shaking with merriment and his eyes take on the knowing light of one who sees a good joke and would distil the last essence therefrom. The gravity of the Master was altogether incongruous. But is not incongruity the very soul of humour? Perhaps it was this incongruity which made the good Abbot laugh so loud and long, a merriment in which he was heartily joined by all those around him.

Then, too, I remembered that although, in sections, the discipline of the Church may be inhibitive, yet is that Church, in the wide view it takes of Life, beneficent in its toleration of the weaknesses of human nature as a whole. Who so lenient in dealing with the venial sins? What concept, in terms of association, more closely knit? Yet in its basic structure, the Church is magnificent in its one-ness, unassailable from without; demanding in its hieractic regnancy, untrammelled belief and enduring loyalty.

The good Master proceeded:

"As a young man I would often look up towards the spot where, they told me, had stood the cell which the unhappy young monk had occupied, and would wonder what manner of monks they could have been in the days when such things had come to pass! There was little chance of any such happenings under our own strict rule, I assure you. But we of the Reichenau still carried on the tradition of art and learning, although the great St. Gall was almost forgotten.

"I worked hard in the scriptorium at the dainty art of limning, and never was happier than when painting in tempera or oil—putting the pious thoughts, the children of my mind, upon the gesso panels for other artists to see and, perhaps, to approve. So much in demand was I for this kind of work that eventually I was permitted to commute my vows of poverty and obedience and go away to Cologne, in order to widen the scope and practise of my art. I was one of that society of monastic painters who, because they were monks and painted, primarily, for the glory of God, had no concern with such matters as worldly reputation. Our dispensation did not permit the recording of signatures, and thus it was that our names were never signed on our pictures; which, doubtless, set a pretty problem for the strategists of authenticity. In later times, however, I am told that we have come to be known by way of compromise, as 'The Master' of this or that work, each after his best-known picture.

"The learned men of later years who have made it their business to give

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

judgment in such things may not be always right; but, on the whole, they have given me fair credit for most of the pictures I painted. They call me after one or other of my outstanding works: sometimes 'The Master of the St. Thomas' Altar'. I may tell you—those of you who in life were interested in values of money—that for my altar-piece of 1485 I was paid two hundred and fifty golden florins—a goodly sum in those days.

"Thus you will understand that I was by no means unknown in my days on earth. I will not admit that I was the best painter in Cologne, as my lord Abbot has suggested, but I may lay claim to a certain repute for my sacred paintings and designs. I know that my work was different from the other painters of my time, and with ideas more advanced than is apparent in much of the work of most fifteenth-century artists. Perhaps my way of presenting such ideas was more striking—more dramatic; and thus caught the fancy of wealthy patrons.

"It was not only in the great city of Cologne that my name became familiar to artists and patrons of art; for in the towns of Dortmund and Munster I gained commissions and worked both for the Church and Herrenfolk, even so far afield as Frankfurt.

"Ah! Frankfurt of happy memory! It came about that one memorable day, a full twenty-five years after I had finished the 'Altar of St. Thomas', I received a visit from the Freiherr Holtzhausen and his wife—both Frankfurters of high dignity and ancient descent. They had journeyed many leagues for the sole purpose of securing the services of a humble and lowly painter—myself. Travelling in those days was both difficult and dangerous. The roads were bad and the intervening country infested with beggars and cut-throats who thought nothing of robbery by violence and even murder if thereby they could obtain a few thalers to spend on schnapps or rum. Modesty might have argued that these noble and leisured people had reasons for braving the hazards of travel other than the mere object of visiting a humble painter in order to commission a picture. Be that as it may, I saw, one morning, a stout travelling carriage draw up at my door and, peering from my casement with the native curiosity of monks and men, I saw that the door of the carriage was blazoned with a shield in quarterings and knew at once that my visitors were of high standing.

"This good gentleman and his wife were pleasant folk of courtly speech and deportment, well knowing in their minds what they wanted, though they were innocent and flatteringly trustful in matters of art. I need not say how honoured I felt in such diffidence shown to an ordinary painter.

"They asked me to paint for them a small altar-piece to adorn the private oratory of their mansion—a 'perfect work', as they confidently explained, to commemorate the confirmation of their only son. Sympathy begets sympathy, and in an intuitive flash of thought I took up my charcoal stick and in rough line and shading portrayed an idea and design which, forming in the locus of the mind, came forth warm and living as the egg of a bird fresh laid in its nest. They had stipulated that the memorial was to be a triptych; small enough to fold up and be carried on a journey, if need be. In the centre panel I painted the Virgin in the attitude of adoring the Holy Infant—a subject which I felt

THE MASTER OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ALTAR

sure would appeal strongly to the parents of an idolised only son. At one side of and in the forefront of this group, I set a faithful full-length portrait of the young son, Martin Holtzhausen; and behind him I painted the figure of his patron, St. Martin of Tours, in panoply of armour. On one flügel, or wing, I contrived a portrait of the father, and set the figure of his heavenly protector and name-saint, St. Andrew, behind him. The left flügel carried a picture of the mother guarded by St. Catherine of Alexandria.

"I need not, to fellow artists, tell of the many and careful studies which I made for these portraits—it was a labour of love which they, a least, will understand. My patrons insisted that for the purpose of obtaining faithful portraits I should come to Frankfurt as their guest. This, to one who had experienced the arrogance and false pride that at times accompanies wealth and high places, was a signal honour; nay, more, it was the offering of the hand of friendship, wherein comparisons are buried in the recognised affinities of mind and spirit. I had never been so happy as I was during this visit. I attended the Confirmation ceremony as an honoured guest and reflected, with tender pride, that it was I who had created this memorial to Youth and Beauty in the service of our Lord.

"It is this triptych which you behold here, in this abode of many treasures."

CHAPTER X

BERNAERT VAN ORLEY

As the Master of St. Bartholomew's Altar concluded his narrative, following upon the story of Francesco Francia, a man of about forty, clad soberly in short doublet and trunnioned hose, rose to his feet at the far end of the table. With one hand he caressed a pugnacious grizzled beard as if to restrain it from thrusting forward, while his large deeply-set eyes gazed from beneath heavy brows upon the assembled gathering. Almost too hard a man, he appeared to me, to be an artist: yet, when he spoke, his voice was musical and low, with a reassuring gentleness which belied his appearance.

"My lord and gentlemen, I had thought to discover my famous fellow countryman Mabuse here and was about to say so when the last speaker forestalled me by rising. I am glad now that he did so for his narration has been most interesting. I should like to revert, however, to the discourse which preceded it, and to observe that I have heard it said that Francesco Raibolini was 'near to being a genius'. My own opinion is that he *was* one. And assuredly the world of art has much to thank him for, since his pupil Timoteo Viti was the first from whom the great Raphael of Urbino learned the mysteries of the painter's craft. So, we may say, the mantle of Francia fell upon the youthful shoulders of the divine Raphael.

"You may be surprised that I, Bernaert van Orley, a native of Brussels, should speak thus of the great Italian painter. But I have naturally a soft spot in my heart for one who was for some years my master. Because of this I suppose I may also say that I am indebted to Perugino, whom you have already heard speak, for he, of course, had some share in guiding the young Raphael."

"Some share, indeed!" interrupted the Perugian. "These cold Northerners are remarkably fond of understatement. Let me tell you that Raphael learned more from me than from any other. You have only to look at his works to see . . ."

With a deprecatory wave of his hand Van Orley cut him short:

"I did not mean to belittle your rightful share in the divine painter's glory, my friend. He was still only nineteen when he came to you, was he not? So he was naturally ready to learn. No! What I was about to observe was that I, Van Orley, owe a debt to Viti and to you for what I learnt from Raphael, both in style and handskill.

"It is true that I originally acquired the rudiments of art from my father, Valentyn van Orley of Antwerp. But I was only a stripling of sixteen when he



THE ANNUNCIATION
by Bernaert van Orley

packed me off to Rome. What a great adventure was that for a lad in his teens—the long journey across Flanders and then through Germany, travelling hard and sleeping rough at the wayside inns, with their great tiled stoves, on the top of which we passed the night! I could never forget the experience of toiling over the Alpine passes: nor the thrill of seeing the road to Italy open up before my wondering eyes. For there below lay the vast plains of Lombardy, across which we slowly made our way to the capital of the Papal States. It was then that I first learnt what colour and light could mean.

"Raphael Sanzio, though not yet thirty years of age, was already famous. When I arrived in Rome he had but recently returned from Florence, where he had been making a name for himself with his lovely Madonnas and other peerless works."

"Oh, yes! I remember," Perugino broke in. "He left me and went to Florence where he very soon altered his style altogether. I suppose it was natural, but he certainly lost the placid beauty, which his pictures had before, and which I had been at such pains to instil into him."

"He matured," countered Van Orley somewhat didactically. "I worked with him for five years and I could see his gigantic powers grow."

"Too true," rejoined Perugino with some asperity; "you were, I suppose, one of the twenty or thirty pupils he had ever working for him. You were with him, I gather, when he was painting in the Vatican those magnificent murals in the first *stanza*—the famous Camera della Segnatura."

"I was indeed," rejoined Van Orley, "and proud I was to be associated with so great a man in the painting of those masterpieces; stupendous works for a young painter of thirty. Mind you, he would not allow me to touch them, but I ground and mixed his colours and watched the masterpieces grow beneath the inspired hands of the master."

"Can you imagine what it meant to a youthful artist like me to live in the Rome of Raphael's time, and, moreover, to live in close touch with the great man himself? He was no mere painter. He was the arbiter of taste, the apostle of Beauty, the one figure which towered above all others—even as Bramante's dome of St. Peter's towers above the Eternal City. He was, in fact, the pinnacle of art-achievement in the High Renaissance."

"In all my work, as in that of Jan Gossaert, who painted that exquisite Adoration of the Magi over the fireplace, you will see how the spirit, the warmth and poetry of the genius of Urbino passed to the colder, matter-of-fact North. Jan Gossaert or, as we often called him, Mabuse, is not present here. Perhaps he made a mistake and has wandered away to the sunny climes of Italy where he found so much to inspire him."

"After six years in the Holy City I returned home with a load of new ideas and improved execution, as who would not, after Raphael's tuition. I found myself with plenty of commissions and made many cartoons for the tapestry weavers—in which I was helped by my experience with Raphael. Among the many pictures I painted during the next five years was this Annunciation, and a number I did to the order of Margaret, Archduchess of Austria, Regent of the

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

Netherlands. She appointed me her Court Painter and, of course, I painted Her Highness's portrait—to her great satisfaction!

"This Annunciation—a work into which I put all the skill I had learned from Raphael—caused quite a sensation on account of its warm colouring and its devotional treatment. You may remember, too, that, just about that time, those outlandish painters—the Breughels—were painting their strange religious subjects, which were regarded by pious folks as irreligious and irreverent. But these were not the only causes of sensation. For about this time I, my family and many of my friends—painters, weavers and goldsmiths—were arrested for attending secret meetings in support of Martin Luther, and, besides being fined heavily, we all had to attend a course of sermons at St. Gudule's as a penance.

"Ah! and I must not forget to tell you that it was about this time that the immortal Albrecht Dürer stayed at my house as an honoured guest, and it is to my eternal glory that he deigned to record on canvas the homely features of Bernaert van Orley. The symbol of an open door on some of his famous woodcuts is a rebus of his name, by which he suggested that *he* it was who opened the door of the Renaissance in the North. But, if he opened the door, we, Mabuse and I, certainly helped to oil the hinges and to push the door wide open."

CHAPTER XI

RAYMOND OF LIMOGES

WHEN the great Flemish master sat down it was apparent that the company had found his talk interesting if not in some degree controversial; for there was quite a hubbub of interchanging opinions. The Abbot allowed a calm eye to travel over the company, until his gaze rested on the small figure of a man at the bottom of the table. As he was already on his feet it would seem that he wanted to say something; at least, that was the Abbot's conclusion, for he smiled and nodded, encouragingly. Our small friend shrugged his shoulders and with a wave of his hand indicated the possible opinion that he being of small stature and maybe of small voice would not be able to make himself heard against some of his loud-voiced compeers. Di Credi and Perugino were going at it hammer-and-tongs, and looking at the little man I felt that I would like to have shouted in my turn at them to be silent; but by this time I had learned that my contribution to the proceedings was limited to observing and taking mental notes.

The Abbot nodded reassuringly to the small figure that had risen, with the air of one able to keep his garrulous company well in hand. He seized one of my beautiful Queen Anne soup-ladles and, to my horror, banged it lustily on the hard oak of the table! . . . I should have remembered that a Norman priest would know nothing about Queen Anne or the choice silver of her reign, or, if he did, would entertain little veneration for such a trifle as a ladle. His action was, however, effective; for the hubbub of contending voices quietened and dwindled to a whisper.

"Peace, peace!" expostulated his lordship. "Know ye, my worthy gentlemen, that a fellow-guest waits to address us! There was much in the speech of the last speaker which is doubtless matter for argument; but courtesy demands that we give an attentive hearing to him who has listened long and faithfully during this happy evening. I pray you, gentles all, pay our friend who has risen to his feet that attention which he has accorded to others, not excluding my unworthy self."

Then ensued rapping of accord, hand-clappings, the tinkling of silver and similar sounds suggestive of the replenishment of drinking vessels, from which it was evident the company was not as yet bored with their entertainment.

The small gentleman at the bottom of the table was plainly dressed in the garb of a French townsman of the sixteenth century. His face was without any striking feature and he was bald. Naturally, being a Frenchman, he was a master of the expressive accompaniment of gesture. He looked round on the

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

company with a frown, while with one hand he twirled a pair of longish moustachios. Though small of stature, he obviously did not lack self-assurance.

"My lord Abbot," he began, "I owe you courteous thanks for permitting one of my size"—naturally the kindly Abbot shook his head and waved a negative hand to deprecate such an idea; but the speaker continued in his own strain—"Oh, I am quite well aware that size goes against a man in a crowd; but flat on his back he sees as well as the big ones." This, of course, produced a laugh. "My name is Pierre Raymond—Pierre Raymond of Limoges." He paused and looked round, challengingly. The Abbot, kindly-wise, hastened to assure him that he knew Limoges well; but Boucher went one better.

"Pierre Raymond?" ejaculated Boucher. "More people, my lord Abbot, have heard of Pierre Raymond than have heard of Limoges. Why the ceramics and faience and *peinture en émail* of Pierre Raymond have no equal. I can assure Monsieur Raymond that there are many examples of his wonderful work at the Louvre and Versailles, and that the incomparable Marie Antoinette herself had *morceaux* of his which she dearly cherished." A murmur of affirmation ran round the table. Monsieur Raymond was evidently satisfied that the applause was given in good faith. He gave another twirl to his moustachios and proceeded.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for your kindly accord. It is well to know from posterity that one's name and one's work linger on in good repute; for in the absence of vandalism my *morceaux* should outlast the sun. Here I see"—he looked round and picked up a plate lying near him—"a set of my plates in enamel. I am, I suppose, expected to tell you something about them." He examined the plates attentively. "They have already outlasted me by centuries and are still as perfect as on the day they left my ovens. That, to an artist, is—good.

"Now, gentlemen, I am the first to speak in praise of the art in which I sought to achieve distinction, and, of course, profit, which factors in life go together; for as I am a Frenchman of humble origin I realise fully the value of money—the stocking in the cupboard under the stairs, or in the chest under the bed. I should tell you, perhaps, that this particular set of enamelled plates which you see before you was made for a very important person, my wife; but ere I launch upon the tale of the plates may I say a little concerning my art?

"I have listened with close attention to others and found much to think about; but I was particularly interested to note that at least three of our friends present have voiced their agreement upon one very interesting point. Each stated that they had received their early training in the intricacies of art in the shops of the goldsmiths. These admissions show that art is basically united—that one branch of art is linked closely to its fellows, for a single trunk serves all. They agreed that training in the art of the goldsmith is the finest a man can have, even when destiny has marked him out for a career in art other than that of working in the precious metals. Again they, as I, know the need there is for infinite care and concentration in tracing some delicate design, first with the pencil and then with the graving-tool, or etching-needle; they know the scope there is for genius as the work proceeds—in enhancing the beauty of the work and increasing its value by the play of the imagination as the theme develops.



A SET OF *GRISAILLE* PLATES
by Pierre Raymond of Limoges

RAYMOND OF LIMOGES

"I, too, of course, went through this initiation into the mystery of goldsmithery. I soon found that there was romance in the prosaic *atelier* with its well-worn benches, its array of anvils, racks of quaint, beautiful tools and its annealing furnaces. I discovered that from such ungraceful things the most beautiful works of art could come—works worthy to adorn the tables of the mighty, or, in the shape of jewellery and other wear, the persons of noble men and lovely women.

"You must know that I received a first-class training as a disciple of St. Eloy, Patron of the Guild of Goldsmiths. Had I been of Florence, or from any town of Italy, I should, doubtless, have graduated into the painting of canvasses or the modelling of figures. I was French and kept, as I might say, to my last. Nevertheless I, too, was a painter; but a painter in enamels, and painting in enamels is a stern art. It is as difficult to become proficient therein as in the use of pigments, whether in *tempera*, in oil, or *buon fresco*.

"I was of Limoges, and in the Limoges of the sixteenth century a young artist was expected to follow the art which his forebears had made famous. Limoges was famed the world over for its enamels; consequently I, Pierre Raymond, became an enameller. I learned this difficult and delicate art at the bench of my father, Jacques Raymond, well-known in the councils of the craft of goldsmithery and of high repute for fine work in all kinds of enamelling. None was cleverer than he in judging the right temperature of the muffle-stove for the proper fusion of the colours he had in hand. I sometimes yearn for the sleepy, picturesque old town in which I grew to manhood, with its crooked old houses and the quaint old shops clustering round its ancient church in the market-place, even as chickens nestle close about the mother hen.

"I fell in love, as is the way of things with men; and the object of my love was the daughter of a coppersmith of Limoges, as pretty a girl as you would find in all France. By this time I had my own shop and had come by a fair repute; but I needed something more than a mere shop for the proper setting up of a wife; and the tiny cottage we settled on in the *Rue Passe-Manigne* was of the sort one finds in dreams. I married and prospered as a good craftsman should do with solid years of sound work behind him. Then ambition demanded a larger house—a home away from the town, the shop and the heat of its ovens and its disarray. Our choice fell on an ideal retreat standing in the midst of a small vineyard. This *vigne* was let to me by the good Abbot of St. Martial for a peppercorn rent of a quarter of a hogshead of wine annually from my rich grapes. My wife Jacqueline was without equal throughout the countryside, and our grapes would not have failed in comparison had they been set alongside the luscious products of far-famed Champagne.

"Thus life flowed for me in happy channels. By the time I had reached my thirties I had made many a good piece of enamel, and as I progressed in skill so did I gain in reputation.

"The years drew on happily enough, and then there came the day when my abilities were, if you will pardon the boast, recognized in a truly public manner: I was chosen Consul of our guild, although I was young for such a choice, being

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

but in my fortieth year. My sweet Jacqueline at that time had grown into a lovely buxom woman and a proper wife in all ways. It was she who was indirectly responsible for my triumph, as I will tell you.

"The time was drawing near for the twentieth anniversary of our marriage and I thought to make for my good wife a set of *grisaille* plates which would be a constant reminder to her of my great love and at the same time serve for the handing round of fruit to the visitors of quality who looked in on me from time to time. Long did I ponder over the problem of a fitting design; both at my shop and while sitting within the porch of my home. One day I remembered some wonderful designs I had seen made by Etienne Delaulne, who some of you may know worked with the great Benvenuto Cellini when he came to Paris, both as a designer and engraver. These designs, which suddenly flashed into my memory, were a set of drawings made to depict the months of the year. I secured them and found, to my delight, that they were exactly what I wanted for my work. My wife, of course, knew nothing of my cogitations and my crafty procuring of the drawings, for the plates were to be a vast surprise to her. I had resolved to do all the work alone, jealous lest any should share the triumph I had in store for myself, or learn my secret and its purpose.

"I cut my copper to a diameter of seventeen centimetres and shaped the sheets on my anvil. I took my carefully prepared colours and painted each plate in lovely *grisaille*. Every one of the twelve plates carried an allegory of the month it represented with the appropriate sign of the Zodiac according to the science of astrology. On the reverse sides I painted bust-portraits of men and women, taking as models handsome folk of our circle of friends. My last act at this stage was to sign the plates with my initials—all except one and on that one, representing the month of October, I put my full name, as you will see it—there: 'P. Rexmon'.

"Ah, the care I used over the firing; one by one they went into the muffle-stove and I watched with strained attention for the moment of flux and glaze. For it is the real test of the enameller's art that he should judge to a hair's breadth the right fusing of the film of opaque colours with the copper base as well as the fusing of the colours themselves.

"When they were at last finished I carried them home—a present for my wife. Her delight equalled the delight I had felt as an artist in excellent work carefully done. I could not have given her a present which would have conferred more pleasure and pride.

"My gift was these plates which you see before you, gentlemen. It was they that earned for me the honour of being elected Consul of the Guild of Limoges! They became our most treasured possession and no great occasion passed but it was honoured by my good Jacqueline producing her anniversary gift.

"The benefit to me of this work did not cease there; for the nobility and wealthy folk, even from distant parts of France, came to see and admire it; and, you may be sure, to be filled with envy, even to the point of leaving behind fruitful commissions. Thus I made a set in replica, which they told me was destined for the King of France himself, the newly crowned Charles IX. Later,

RAYMOND OF LIMOGES

I made a similar set for President Segquier, certain pieces of which bore his arms. The set before you is still, I see, complete. That is a rarity after so many, many years; for in my experience I have frequently found that one trouble or another has led to a missing piece, and so the whole is spoiled.

"I cannot gaze upon them but I find myself once more back in my shop packing them for the journey home—to my good wife and to the peace of home and the glory of the ripened grape. All these happinesses are fused into that quiet colour scheme; for the work is of my hands and I know how the thoughts, the depths of pure affection and signal purpose, can enter into and abide in a man's work well done."

CHAPTER XII

ISAAC SUTTON

IT is no sign of conceit in an artist of such repute to say, as Raymond had said, that the work of his hands was well done. Surely the master of any craft, be it what it may, is well able to judge, and judging state, as a mere matter of sober truth, that he knows his work to be good. The experience of my drama assured me that it was no mere conceit—no boastfulness, such as that splendid genius Cellini too often indulged in—that made these men pass a just estimate upon their own work.

I had noticed that Isaac Sutton, the goldsmith of London, who had had a slight altercation with Philippe de Champaigne over his "great salt", had kept it close at his elbow for the whole evening.

And now there had come a slight pause in the action of my dream of which advantage was taken by most of the company to refill emptied glasses, pewters and tobies, as Isaac Sutton heaved himself somewhat ponderously to his feet. His hair was his own, grey and straggling, and he now thrust a large and capable hand through it. His face was round of features, indefinite but red in their colouring, and lit by exceptionally bright blue eyes—English of the English, I thought to myself with a tinge of envy; for I like the Anglo-Saxon type. I noticed that he had tucked the "great salt" under one arm and with such an air of possession that I swear I shall never feel unalloyed ownership of that handsome receptacle again! The renowned Isaac was undoubtedly "tough", in modern phraseology, and I could not see any person in the company capable of taking my valued "salt" away from him, if he cared to be "nasty".

"Saving the presence of your lordship and you, gentlemen and fellow artists, I would like you all to know that this 'great salt' is mine." Isaac Sutton tapped my piece still under his arm, and, in the dream-state, I feared he might mean it literally. Then he drew it forth and held it up for all to see. The pride of something more than mere ownership glowed in his eyes—it was veritably the light of creation; an intimacy in the relation of man to object which money could never establish. He had made concrete an image sprung from thought and in that act of materialization his personality would dwell in his work for ever. The "great salt" certainly looked very handsome as he held it up and turned it this way and that so that its innumerable facets of crystal and gold should reflect the flickering light of the candles to all parts of the room.

"When I made this 'salt' (it was in the year 1572), the mighty Elizabeth sat majestically upon the throne of England—imperious, tyrannical, if you like, but a



SILVER-GILT RENAISSANCE
SALT

by Isaac Sutton

queen in everything that makes a queen! I would say, gentlemen, that no queen—nay, no sovereign—ever had the wit to surround the throne with greater men.

"I worked for most of these chosen wits and knew them: William Cecil; my lord Burleigh; Walsingham; Drake; Howard; Robert Dudley, the powerful Earl of Leicester; Raleigh . . . they were a host! Love for queen and country ran like a vein of gold from the highest to the lowest! It was truly a time of luxury and spending and display, and never were our English silversmiths and workers in jewellery more in demand.

"I have met such men as Drake and Hawkins and looked on them as gods. Did not that immortal hero, Francis Drake, twice circumnavigate the world? And was not the name of Hawkins cursed and feared wherever the seas rolled and wherever rose enemies of our State and people? Ah, gentlemen, those were the days of the Englishman at his best—the richest and ripest blood in the world . . . the blood and bread of the then untainted English strain.

"But there, gentlemen, ye will think me playing the part of a warrior and a contriver of politics behind the ale-house door. Therefore will I say that, though a prosperous London tradesman and devoted to the Guild of my craft, I eschewed politics and the voicing of opinions on matters other than the close borough of my art, which first and last was goldsmithery. All that such as I could do to show where lay our sympathies and, yes, the object of our hero-worship, was to express our devotion in our labours when, for example, one or other of these great men ordered a piece from us—a commemorative cup, a medallion, or such-like.

"We guildsmen had our favourites in the political world you may be sure; but those were the days of the struggle between Papists and Protestants, and fanaticism was apt to run high. Never was there a time when the adage—a still tongue maketh a wise head—was more true. Besides, early in these difficult days we had to remember that a great patron of art had been robbed of her powers of patronage; I mean the Church, as it was known before the time of Henry VIII, or Bluff King Hal, as that most villainous king was named. Thank God that there was more humane stuff in his daughter!

"Vast amounts of ecclesiastical plate and like valuables had been brought to the guilds, with orders for the character thereof to be eliminated and the metal recast, or refurbished, for the use of the laity. Bluff King Hal did an astute job in sacking the monasteries; for few imagined there was such wealth in England as came to light with the king's secretaries and sleuths on the trail of the hoardings by the Church over centuries. Out of chalices we made drinking-cups; out of reliquaries we fashioned 'salts' or coffrets. Dishes and other domestic objects for the table and my lady's chamber were contrived from heavy plate erstwhile the property of Prior or Prebend.

"I remember the year before I made this magnificent piece that the first Statute of the Session had forbidden the import into England of articles of religious use, such as crosses, rosary-beads, reliquaries and similar objects. About the same time Mr. Secretary Cecil—that is Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and son of the powerful Lord Burleigh—repealed the salt monopoly,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

promulgating the good news in these words: '... because you may eat your meat more savoury than you have done every man shall have salt as good and cheap as he can buy it or make it freely without danger of that patent which shall presently be revoked'.

"When I received the commission to make this 'great salt' I had not a suspicion for whom it might be intended; except that it must be for one of the 'great' because of specified details such as no commoner would demand. The nobles of those days frequently sent their lackeys with commissions: it was a lackey who came to me, and he let fall so little information of value to the curious that I could but try to draw my own conclusions. I suspected my commission was from no less a person than Her Majesty herself and the recipient the mighty Francis Drake—our invincible Drake, soon expected to drop anchor in the Plymouth roads with the scars of a victorious *Nombre de Dios* on men and ship. We waited for the hero to tell us of the drubbings he had given the haughty Dons of Spain; but we little suspected that he should tell us of the limitless expanse of what men came to call the far western ocean—the mighty Pacific!

"The name of Drake, linked thus in but a chancy manner of gossip with my 'great salt', wrought me to a high pitch of enthusiasm and, I trust, inspiration. The flawless crystal was cut with meticulous care; three round balls were for the feet; two for the bosses and the cylinder to contain the salt. The best of lapidaries, with wheel and drill fed with the dust of diamonds, carved the clear colourless crystals. The silver parts I fashioned with punch and snarling-iron in the fine relief of flowers and fruit which, as you see, adorn it. I modelled and chiselled the various straps of soft metal, making of them caryatids and crestings and other ornaments of beauty. Then, above all, poised upon a spherical bead of crystal, I set a tiny figure of Fame—verily appropriate, I reflected, to grace a gift destined for the greatest naval hero of the world.

"The 'salt' was finished just in time. I myself delivered it one afternoon in August. I set out from my shop in Bread Street in the City of London—a street close by the Strand where many artists in metals foregathered. Well-armed apprentices strode behind me, or at my side, and in safety I passed the grand new palace of my Lord Somerset, by the country road leading to the little village of Charing and hard by Eleanor's Cross, there to effect my delivery at the house of Sir Charles Wynward, Lord-in-Waiting to Her Majesty. One of my finest pieces of work was done; and thus passed from my hands—a gift, if I may say so, from Art to Posterity.

"To feel my goodly work again beneath my palms is a joy; for it recalls so much of the past, which for us stout tradesmen of London in the time of the Great Queen was a happy past! Gaiety and freedom had come to England, which the land had not known in the previous reign; for then there was little unity between the King, the great nobles and the people. But the whole century, to me, was a true renaissance—I speak for my own art as knowing little of others. Yet did not the rough Tudor England produce a lad called William Shakespeare—the immortal Bard of Avon? Did not our brave Ben Jonson say of him: 'Thou art a monument without a tomb!'"

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOLDSMITH OF NUREMBERG

THERE was considerable applause when Isaac Sutton finished. It was evident that his reference to Shakespeare had struck a resounding note in the hearts of those of the company who had lived after the sixteenth century. Master Sutton deemed it his duty to rise again. He folded his arms with elbows well away from his chest and inclined his head this way and that, with an occasional central bob, and was undoubtedly well flattered at his reception.

In the meantime another person had managed to attract my attention. He had come from the lounge during Isaac Sutton's recital and had waited by the drawing-room doors, and never for a moment had his eye wandered from the goldsmith and his work. After letting my eye travel from this person to Master Sutton, I managed to "place" him: it was Andreas Bergmann, a clever master of goldsmithery among the Germans. I had a pair of gilt cups by him, I remembered, which of course would justify his presence and his obvious interest in the London craftsman. He was dressed as a typical well-to-do burgher of the seventeenth century would be. His ample, knee-length coat was puffed out at the shoulders and possessed sleeves which were turned broadly back at the wrists to reveal a frilling of white cuffs.

Around his neck he had the fashionable white "cart-wheel" ruff of the period, and he wore his hair long. Light woollen hose, square-toed shoes and a steeple-crowned felt hat, carried in one hand, finished the broad picture of his habiliments. I should not forget to mention, however, that under his arm he hugged a dark-brown box of high polish; though for what purpose I could not imagine. So far, I had not observed any of my "guests" bringing anything to the feast: what they might take away, I considered, would be another matter.

As our friend Isaac Sutton was on the point of sitting down, this stout burgher of Germany strode quickly up to him and clapped a hand on his shoulder ere Master Sutton could settle in his seat. The London craftsman turned a stern countenance towards him, suggesting that any form of man-handling from a stranger might be made a subject for discussion. Bergmann, however, received the stern look with a profound bow and wave of his hat, which he deposited on the table when the bow had finished its course; he also set the box beside the hat. He rubbed his hands together in appreciation and with cheerful nods leant forward and tapped the stern-faced citizen of London several times on the chest with an extended finger. That was too much for Master Sutton. He

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

folded his arms and held them elbows out from his chest—a gesture I imagined he may have acquired in youth from leaning on counters—scowled back at the smiling German and said, in a thunderous voice:

“God’s body, my master . . . what would you with these diggings in the paunch of a freeman of London?”

“Pardon, mein Herr ——”

“I am not thy ‘Herr’,” roared the scandalized Isaac Sutton. “I am plain Master Isaac Sutton ——”

“Of course, of course,” agreed Bergmann, soothingly. “All the world knows the greatest goldsmith of the sixteenth century—of any century for that matter.”

“Well?” breathed the stout Londoner, getting back a normal colour and mollified by the respectful air of his interlocutor, “—er—well? in London, my master ——”

“‘Mein Herr’ in our city of Nuremberg, *Master Sutton*.”

“‘Tis well,” agreed Sutton; “in London, mein Herr, we shake the hand by way of greeting—thuswise,” and, so saying, he seized the hand of the German and shook it with such untoward pressure that the victim’s eyes watered and he returned Isaac’s hearty roar with a wintry smile, parting his fingers one by one from their painful cohesion.

“‘Tis to make a martyrdom of goodwill! I have heard much of thee, Master Sutton, and of thy work; but I never had a piece of thine art in my hands.”

“‘Tis but a trifle,” the good Isaac hastened to assure him. “But,” he continued, more kindly, “by what name art thou known in this gathering of artists? What dost thou in fine work, Herr ——?”

“Bergmann—Andreas Bergmann of the free City of Nuremberg . . . the greatest and noblest of all the towns of Bavaria.” Seeing the London man frown in the effort of trying to recall the names he knew, Bergmann waited for recognition. But Master Sutton shook his head apologetically.

“Nuremberg I know, and Germany I know; and I have in my store of memory the great workers in goldsmithery ——”

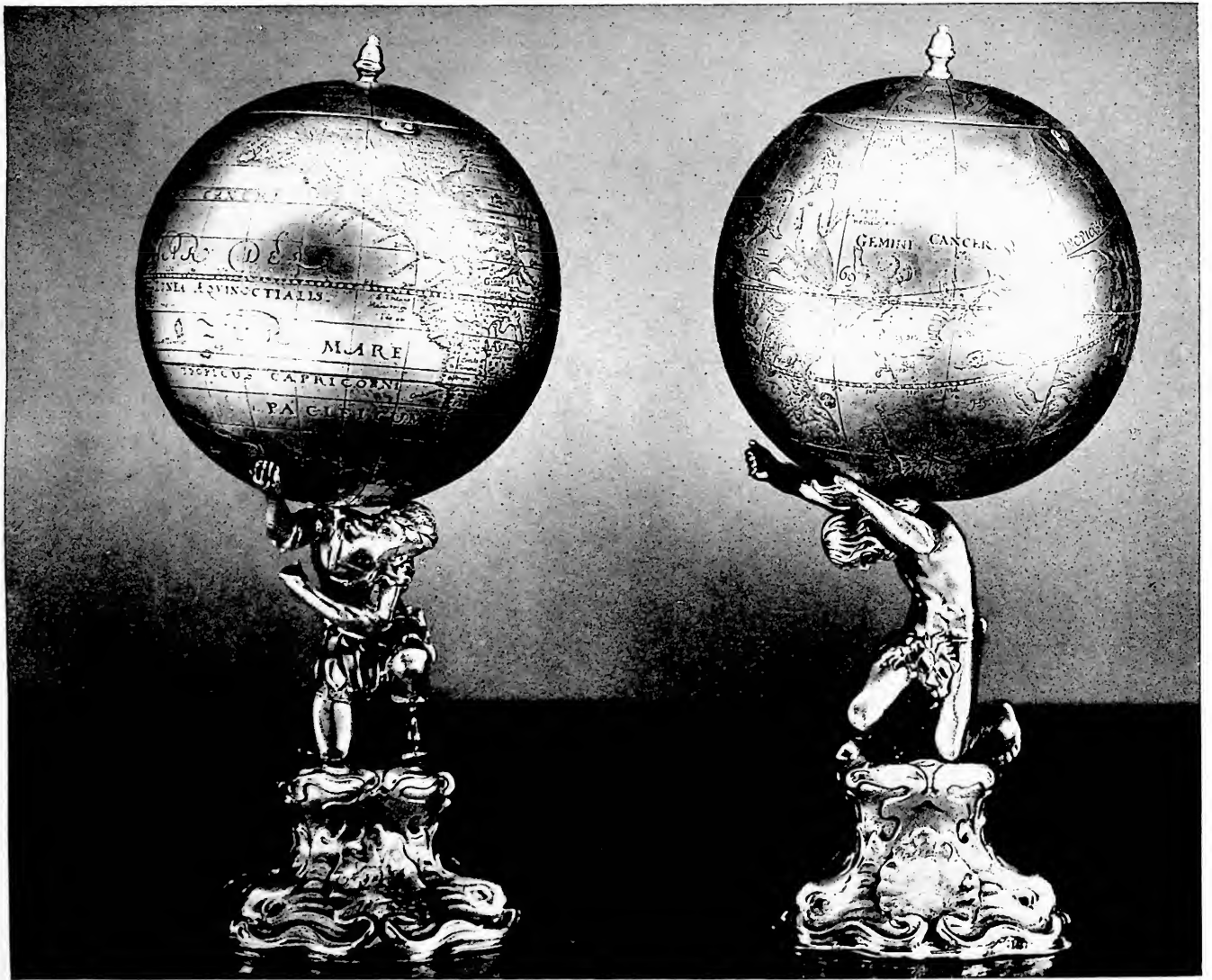
“Then you will have in that memory the name of Andreas Bergmann, of the free City of Nuremberg, in the far-famed state of Bavaria ——”

“I did never hear thy name, my master, for all thy speechings; and I would say that we of London retained stout friendships in all the great towns of the world, and among these, even as thou sayest, is Nuremberg ——”

“What!” cried the now scowling Bergmann, evidently hit on a tender spot. “Will you tell me you have had *liaison* with my free City of Nuremberg and yet know not the name of Andreas Bergmann! My good—my kind and most revered Master Sutton—tell me not that. If the wine had been weaker, thy memory had been stronger ——”

“The wine is good; but not so good as though wouldst make it appear, Herr Bergmann ——”

“But—look, mein friend. . . . Will you tell me that a man in our noble art could fashion beauty such as this and be—be as a mole beneath the earth!” So saying, Bergmann with a dramatic flourish threw open the lid of the box which



A PAIR OF SILVER-GILT GLOBES, TERRESTRIAL AND CELESTIAL
by Andreas Bergmann of Nuremberg

THE GOLDSMITH OF NUREMBERG

stood next to his high-crowned hat and, as he did so, a brilliant flash of golden light seemed to come from within. Then the company perceived that the flash was but the reflection, which the many candles around had called forth, from two magnificent globular cups of silver-gilt within the case. I gasped, for the two cups within that box were the two which I, myself, had set out on our sideboard but two or three hours back! These two cups were, of course, by this well-known goldsmith. I felt very much annoyed with that ironclad among artists, Isaac Sutton, for pretending that Bergmann was a man of no import in the world of Art. He was all wrong—disgustingly wrong! That, however, did not alter the fact that my treasures were having liberties taken with them—and—what were those two precious cups doing in a box which I had never seen before? All the same, I should have liked to have owned that box and, rather foolishly, I found myself wishing that when Bergmann “passed along” he might leave his handsome box behind him.

But I am getting away from the dialogue of the two artists in goldsmithery, and the definitely touching consternation of Andreas Bergmann that so great a man as Isaac Sutton had never heard of him.

Master Sutton watched a now really angry and defiant Bergmann snatch the precious cups from their seating in the box, raising a hand in protest at the evident roughness of the withdrawing. Then his gesture changed, and the hand raised in protest became a hand stretched eagerly forth to seize the treasures. In Bergmann’s haste and irritation one of the beautiful globes fell over and Master Sutton’s hand darted upon it in the manner of a snake darting on its prey. He seized it; held it up to the light, rising from his seat in excitement that he might the better get the candle-light upon it; turned it round, slowly; held it from him and then brought it close to his sharp eye. Bergmann watched this deliberate process, maliciously, and with some triumph; for he knew that Master Sutton was smitten, and smitten hard, with a vast enthusiasm.

Here the Abbot rose. He had been watching with some distress the evident ill-humour growing up between the man of London and the man of Nuremberg. He glanced sharply at Philippe de Champaigne, who, one would have said from a cursory glance, was striving hard to keep back an outburst of mirth. Evidently the good Abbot regarded the little affair as no laughing matter. He rapped the big table with a spoon lying handy and drew all eyes, except those of Isaac Sutton, upon him.

“My friends—my good and worthy friends,” he said reproachfully, “this is surely no matter for discord in so harmonious a gathering! Surely we can observe the courtesies? I have listened and enjoyed talk on matters beyond my earthly span, of which I had quite been ignorant, for I, as you all know, am of the eleventh century —” Here Philippe de Champaigne rose and managed to drive the laughter from his face. He said:

“I crave pardon, my lord Abbot, for that mirth which you read so clearly in my eyes; yet indeed here is a matter which is jocund and food for mirth.” He looked around and saw that others—those of the later centuries—were smiling hugely. “You see, my lord, that I am not alone in my mirth.” He waved a

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

graceful hand towards those on whose faces sat excellent imitations of what in the earth-life would be called "grins". The Abbot looked as he was bidden and nodded. Then he, too, smiled; as if caught by the infection of under-running humour.

"It is as you say Monsieur de Champaigne. But pardon my innocence—my ignorance . . . may not so goodly a jest be shared? I would say that Herr Andreas Bergmann and Master Isaac Sutton would be the better and more at ease were their differences to be clarified in—jest."

Quoth the good burgher of Nuremberg: "'Tis no matter for mirth, my lord Abbot, when a man of my fame is disowned by one of his craft . . . albeit," he added sarcastically, "this stout Master Sutton is passed into a trance on behoof of my cups."

"Nay, nay, Herr Bergmann," said Philippe de Champaigne, "thou art not altogether just to good Master Sutton, who is an honest man; for if he had been less honest and willing to forswear himself in the name of courtesy, then had he lied in saying you were known to him, or that he had heard of your work. I, of course, know your work and pronounce it the equal of his own masterpieces——"

"Taus and Teuflen! How should'st thou know me—thou a painter, and yet a fellow artist in goldsmithery denies me!"

"Ah, these apparent indignities run to heat, I fear. But it is very simple; both of you have forgotten the sequence of the centuries. Here, we have no time; but on earth time is everything: it brings us through the door of Life and thrusts us forth and that inevitably. Time so served you both." I observed that Isaac Sutton was lending an ear to the argument. "Time has put a century between you. Therefore it is quite in order that you should know the work of Master Sutton, but quite impossible that Master Sutton should know the work of Herr Bergmann."

The Abbot here joined in the hearty laughter that rang round the dining-hall. Sutton and Bergmann stared at one another. Then slowly into their eyes came the understanding of the jest; and to my delight they clapped friendly hands on shoulders that shook with the laughter of an explanation which, to them, seemed amazing in its simplicity, although no tribute to their intelligence. Isaac Sutton was the first to find words:

"By God's body!" he shouted, shaking the good burgher in an access of affection, "but thou and the hand of Time have made of me a pin-buttocked wench? I cry your pardon, my lord Abbot, and your mercy, Herr Andreas Bergmann; for such a foolishness comes hard on a man who should of all things be worldly-wise. Thou in one spate of time and I in another, and by the Will of God mine eyes were as the eyes of the mole! Oh, oh! my lads of the Guilds had roasted and hung me for less! Come, my friend, sit ye down and we will probe the merits of this grand work of thine to the very heart of it!" He thrust the now smiling man of Nuremberg into a seat at his side, picked up one of the handsome globes and expanded in a critical eulogy, which, by the look of it, had gone on until the fair hours of dawn, had not the good Abbot, and the

THE GOLDSMITH OF NUREMBERG

company generally, had other ideas thereon. The Abbot rapped again on the table and the voluble Master Sutton found himself the centre of warning looks and a variety of hushings. Said the Abbot:

"Thanks be to God that the dove of peace hath fallen upon us. But, my friends, were it not well that Herr Bergmann, who is entered nobly into his kingdom of—of identity— should tell us his story?"

"'Twould be more than well, my lord Abbot," agreed Master Sutton, amiably. "My examination and criticisms shall wait their tending. Come, Andreas, old friend—on thy hind legs and God be with thee. Talk as thou hast worked and thou shalt be hailed as a very Pericles." So saying he hoisted Bergmann to his feet and for a moment held him there; as if he feared he might relapse and seek to forgo his speech-making. Bergmann's face was red and happy with such appreciation. He patted Master Sutton's large hand, which gripped one shoulder, in assurance that he would not sink again into his chair; then he faced the company bravely, picking up one of the cups as he did so.

"These globe-cups are especially typical of the middle of the seventeenth century, though, I would have you understand, by no means common in any period. I made these two to the order of Ferdinand III, sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire; King of Germany, Hungary and Bohemia; Archduke of Austria, and Duke of Burgundy.

"I was of Nuremberg, and Nuremberg was a city of which one was proud to be a citizen. It was ever the seat of German culture and a world-centre of the arts and learning. Cannon were cast in Nuremberg as early as the year 1350, and it was but a few years later that the first paper-mill was set up. Brass was produced in Nuremberg before the rest of the world knew of that valuable alloy. In the year 1550 Peter Henlein made the first of the world's watches, which I might tell you were called 'Nuremberg eggs' because of their shape. And in the art of the painter did we not breed the great Albrecht Dürer?"

"I tell you these few facts, my friends, in order that you may know that Nuremberg well deserved its sobriquet of the 'Florence of the North'. The communal spirit of the townsfolk was strong. We of Nuremberg loved the old town of picturesque houses with their quaint and irregular lines and high, sloping roofs broken by dormer windows. We did not lack brightness, for the walls of our homes were decked with colours and gildings, while their fronts were rich in Gothic carvings. We Bavarians loved flowers, and there was never a house but had the glory of garden and field for its adorning. Our streets were narrow and shady; the ways being paved with cobble-stones. Our market-place was a wide and handsome square with the steeples of St. Sebald and four mighty round towers rising in majestic dominance.

"I speak with pride of my City; I was proud, too, of our powerful Guild of Goldsmiths; for was I not Master of the Guild in the year 1651? For nearly twenty years I was one of the Higher Council of the City State.

"In order that you may understand my cups, I must explain that three years before I came to the office of Master of the Guild the treaty of Westphalia was signed. The Holy Roman Empire made peace with the French at Münster and

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

with the Swedes at Osnabrück. Thus the Emperor Ferdinand III came to turn his thoughts to the arts and crafts of peace. It was then that I made these cups, which I finished in the year following the declaration of the Peace of Nuremberg. Ah, I well remember the abandonment of joy shown by the thankful townsfolk! A fête in the market-place and, for us of the Senate, a magnificent banquet in the fourteenth-century *Saal* of the *Rathaus*, with fireworks far into the night. It was at this banquet that I, a proud and happy man, set out these two cups, which now stand before me; for the Emperor's commission was an honour not only for me but an honour for the town.

"You may be sure that when I was entrusted with the task of designing and making these gilt globes I gave much time and thought to the work. As you see, each globe rests upon a fanciful pedestal in the style made popular by the Dutch silversmiths, Adam, and Christian van Vianen, having dolphins amid waves and baroque cartouches engraved with mythical monsters. I had always admired the work of these artists and thought it well to emulate a style so pure and classical.

"I have said that such globes were rare; but they became much esteemed in the seventeenth century, both the terrestrial and the celestial kinds. The discoveries of Drake, Magellan, Columbus and Vespucci had shown not only that the world was round but that there were vast areas to be explored. Also, globes were much more interesting than flat maps such as those produced in the cartography of Mercator and Hodis, which had been published early in the century.

"I made the Celestial Globe according to the most recent researches in the science of astronomy; cunningly engraving thereon the positions of the stars and the fanciful figures of the constellations. I considered it fitting that this Celestial Globe should rest upon the bowed shoulders of Hercules, who, you will remember, once took the burden from Atlas, condemned by Zeus to stand at the western extremity of the Earth, nearby the Garden of the Hesperides, to uphold the heavens upon his shoulders—a just penalty for the part Atlas took in the battle of the Titans.

"On the base, beneath the foot, I engraved against a black-enamelled ground an inscription in the tongue of Latium: my moral being that Science is not confined to the affairs of Earth, but ever gazes upward at the heavenly hosts, calculating their movements and progressions, examining known effects, and judging the course of futurity. But the Christian mind considers the rotation of the stars as in the direct ordinance of God."

The good burgher of Nuremberg here placed the cup held in his hand upon the table and took up its fellow, which he raised high for all to see.

"This is the Terrestrial Globe. I engraved the meridians and maps upon the silver with the finest care, following, in doing so, the then recent charts of Mynheer Blau of Amsterdam. In designing the supporter of this globe, I found my sought-for opportunity to pay homage to my Imperial patron. I founded my inspiration upon a classic author whose words I adapted to my design. Hear ye them, my lord Abbot and *freunden*:

THE GOLDSMITH OF NUREMBERG

"Famous was Ninus for his empire, as also was he who was called Darius. Great was the youth of Pella: But I, Cæsar, son of Julius, give not place to either. I, first among the rulers, sprung from Romolus . . . I, supreme king and first of emperors! Therefore the whole world rests of right upon my shoulders!' Pella was, of course, the mighty Alexander the Great. Well did I know that the Emperor, our Ferdinand—Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire—would at once understand my meaning; for was he not himself Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, now seated on Cæsar's throne? He would know that my 'Cæsar' was the same as the German word 'Kaiser'. Therefore, sure in the faith of being read aright, did I model the stem with the figure of the Emperor Augustus, first of all the Emperors of Rome. Mark ye, friends, our Emperor was a scholar and a linguist and my work for his reading was a double compliment—a compliment to his mighty sway and to his erudition as a man of learning."

Here Master Sutton, who had been following the German's words intently, looked up at him and tweaked his coat, saying: "Prithee, good Herr Andreas, some of us are doubtless more of scholars than others and some of us are less scholars than others. For me, I take no shame in saying that my learning of the Greek and the Latin is that of Master William Shakespeare, of whom bully Ben Jonson said: 'Thou hadst small Latin and less Greek'. Discourse a little, I pray ye, on this Ninus and your Darius and Pella; for of a sooth I know not the brave Alexander of the horse Bucephalus in the guise of Pella."

Proud in his knowledge the good burgher of Nuremberg threw out his chest and exclaimed: "The clarification shall be as you say, my master. Know then that Ninus was one Un Nina, progenitor of the ancient dynasties of Ur, which is to be found in the Vulgate as Ur of the Chaldees. Darius the son of Cyrus was the ruler of the Persian Empire, and Darius yielded his realm to Alexander of Macedonia. Pella was the Island where this Alexander of ancient history, the conqueror of the world, was born. The adopted son of Julius Cæsar was Augustus, the first of the Roman Emperors.

"I would remind those of you, my friends, who know not of the Thirty Years War that it was both a political and a religious strife—a struggle between the Catholic League, which was the strongest in the South German States, and the Protestant Union, which was dominant in the North. Like many wars, this terrible and protracted war started from minor causes. Bohemian officials were flung from the windows of the Palace at Prague in 1618. Fearful and bitter was the quarrel thus set afoot, which spread like a vast, overwhelming conflagration fanned by the winds of hate and cruelty. Think of the countries which became involved! Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, France, Spain and Italy! I tell you, we Germans looked on the Emperor Ferdinand as a god for his Peace of Westphalia after thirty years of tragedy.

"Perhaps I should have brought out more clearly the statesmanship of the Emperor in this matter; for he emerged from the war as the paramount power in Central Europe. His rivals were subdued; France, Sweden and Holland were his allies, and Spain and Italy were driven back to their legitimate spheres of influence. So one might have said, as I did say in the symbol of my cup, that

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

the world, as in the days of Cæsar Augustus, had come to rest upon the shoulders of this great prince.

"Was I fulsome in my flattery? You think so; so be it; but was I more fulsome than those writers of old, Cicero and Horace, in their adulation of Cæsar? And, moreover" (here a knowing twinkle sparkled in the eye of the good burgher of Nuremberg) "it would be a poor craftsman that would not turn history to account to please a mighty patron and at the same time earn an honest penny."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHALICE OF KNUTHOWNA

IT would be hard to find a greater contrast than that between the last speaker, who had resumed his seat as impressively as he had risen from it, and the aged priest who, at a nod and smile from the Abbot, left his place at the bottom of the table and tottered across the dining-hall to the fireplace. On the mantelpiece stood my priceless gold chalice of Knuthowna. So bent and frail was the old man that I marvelled how he saved himself from tripping over his black alpaca robe, shiny and discoloured with age. His small head, tonsured and scanty of hair, trembled on his thin neck; his countenance was yellow and shrivelled, with the skin so tightly drawn that every prominence of feature shone as with a recent polish; his eyes were flecked with the sclerosis of age, and yet their regard was steady and of a great understanding and kindness; but he was very, very old. I saw when he reached his objective that his lips, thin and colourless, parted in the familiar *pax vobiscum*, and that two fingers of his hand were curved towards their palm leaving the trinity of digits to impart, as it were, an unpremeditated benediction. He then placed a trembling hand on the chalice, as though, in feeling it, he were the more brought to realise that it was actually there before him.

The old priest looked up—straight at my dark corner of shadows and, straight, it seemed to me, into my eyes. Such a regard, when I had flattered myself that I was seeing but unseen, was most unwelcome, and it seemed to me that, instinctively, I shifted uneasily. But the gentle eyes of the old priest followed me. He shook his head and gave me a slight reproachful smile, as much as to say I should be seen wherever I went and might therefore just as well give it up. I smiled back, or imagined I did, as a bright youth will smile at his preceptor and hope for the best. The old priest looked benignantly round upon the company and began his story:

“Here, over the hearth-place—that place of honour for the kindly household gods of old—stands, as you will see, a cup of purest gold. This chalice—tells a story of the days of piety in which it was made. Mark ye the tall and slender shape; a lovely body of fair metal exquisitely worked in the noble style of the seventeenth century, in which I lived. Look at the scrolled foot of the sacred cup and you will see that it bears three medallions in relief between cherub-heads, and the pictures of three saints high in the ranks of those canonised by the Holy Church: first, there is the sainted Benedict, the founder of the powerful Order of Benedictines, whose monasteries and convents were shrines

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

of holiness in a world not all as yet wholly christianised; then there is St. Benedict's twin sister, Saint Scholastica . . . a perfect twin united by deep and true affection; lastly, there is Saint Barbara, virgin, martyr and patron saint of the kingdom of Poland.

"You will see that a trinity of Angels adorns the stem. On a slender neck is placed the richly-chased and pierced calix of the cup, decorated with Cherubim and three small reliefs of scenes from the most sacred Passion of the Christ: the Flagellation, the Crowning with Thorns, and the Crucifixion. The bowl itself is of plain-beaten gold. The precious cup, as I have said, is a chalice; and ye will know that the purest metal only may be used for holding the Sacred Elements. Beneath the foot is inscribed a Latin inscription from which we learn that the holy vessel was made to the honour and glory of God on the occasion of the election of Barbara Knuthowna as Abbess of the Convent at Czarnowice, in Kielse.

"The convent was founded in the year 1589 under the rule of the sainted Benedict; hence the image of this great ruler of men is found figured on the foot of the chalice.

"I have said that St. Benedict and St. Scholastica were twins; and between them existed the closest bonds of human affection. When St. Scholastica knew that her end was approaching she visited her brother and stayed, loath to leave him, until the night drew on. He considered that she should return to her convent before dark; but in her deep affection she begged him to allow her to stay, in order that they should remain together in holy converse, since this would be their last meeting on earth. Still the brother insisted that she must return; whereupon the sister, closing her eyes in prayer, besought Heaven for a sign by which her brother might be constrained to grant her last wish. Thereupon a storm gathered on the horizon and, rising athwart the heavens, grew to such violence that her going became impossible." The old priest paused in his tale and, reaching up, took the precious chalice from its place, holding it in his withered hands so that the beauty of its rich surface, so enhanced by skilful chasing and beaten relief, should shine in the light of the many guttering candles.

"It is fitting," he said, looking round and finally meeting my watchful eye in the shadows; "it is fitting that this sacred vessel should be reverently preserved. If for a time it must be possessed by a layman, then it is by God's blessing that it hath fallen into the hands of one of the Faithful; one who will know how to revere it and set it in company with other sacred things. Here—" (he nodded and looked around the walls and on the tables and his gaze was that of a man assured and satisfied) "here are many holy relics and associations of Mother Church; so that my heart knows that no desecration is likely to come upon the holy vessel.

"Further, it is well that the temporary possessor should have it in constant memory that this beautiful vessel came from the House of God and will in its due time return thereto. Of that desirable destiny I am well assured; for I have looked within the heart"—he paused. His lips moved for a moment, as in prayer, and then he added—"and I am content.



THE GOLDEN CHALICE OF KNUTHOWNA

THE CHALICE OF KNUTHOWNA

"I would fain tell you of the associations of my beloved cup: Know ye, then, that I was a priest of the Order of St. Benedict. In due time they made me chaplain of the Convent at Czarnovice; which appointment coincided with the coming of the blessed Barbara to the convent in the holy office of Abbess. That was in the year 1648. Later, the Abbess confided to me that she intended to have a new chalice made for the service of the altar in honour of her election. A noted goldsmith of the City of Danzig was to make the work. Ah, me; how well I remember the coming of the chalice—a thing of infinite beauty and wrought with the finest and most enduring workmanship!

"A special Service of Dedication was granted for the occasion of the consecration of the holy vessel; which was carried in solemn procession on a cushion of richest velvet, unveiled, so that all could see the beauty of man's finest work, to be offered to the Service of God. The day was gloriously fine and the sunlight of a Polish summer morn shone upon the burnished gold of the offering; for, indeed, the chalice was sacred in every meaning of the word.

"The Lord Bishop of Kielse had come for the consecration. It was he who carried the holy cup; and the people, I love to think, bowed down the more reverently because the offering to God was beautiful in itself and would be forever associated with their Abbess, Barbara Knuthowna. She, herself, was a beautiful woman and gentle; for her beauty was born of a perfect, untrammelled life, devoted wholly to the service of her Maker. Yet the people, when they look upon a saint, love to discern the human trait of personal beauty; for beauty doth tend to make all human hearts, superficially at least, akin. Even her severe, black habit and her plain wimple could not hide the fact of an outer loveliness reflecting the inner beauty of soul and spirit which was hers. Her beauty, however, was as nothing to her; and little did she know how it enhanced the joy and pride that glowed upon her refined features to see her lovely chalice brought within the fold of the Church, and how the light of something more than earthly beauty was seen in her by her adoring people.

"To me, a humble priest of God, the Lady Barbara was an Angel from Heaven as she led her own community in the brave light of the sun. She followed after my lord Bishop and his assistant priests, who were clad in copes of golden thread and chasubles of white brocaded silk, embroidered with coloured silks and lace of gold. Then came the acolytes in red cassocks and linen cottas, each bearing a lighted taper in its swaying, crystal sheath. As the solemn and colourful procession wound its slow way across the square and in at the convent gates, the *Te deum Laudamus* was chanted to the plainsong melody composed by the sainted Gregory of blessed memory. Oh, the great moment when the chalice came to rest upon the altar of our chapel, gleaming in the light of a hundred tapers! Our heartfelt prayers were offered to the Most High in thanksgiving alike for the beautiful chalice and for the advent of our beloved Abbess.

"I used the chalice on many special occasions, the last of which was at the requiem mass said for the repose of the soul of the blessed Barbara herself. The holy cup was never used again."

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

The old priest, who had held the vessel in his withered hands—trembling, so that I feared lest he should let it fall—now carefully replaced it on the mantelpiece, to my great relief. He raised a hand in blessing for a moment, quelling the murmur of thanks for his tale which came gently from the company.

“Early in the nineteenth century the Grande Armée of the vainglorious Napoleon retreated from a burning, but triumphant Moscow. The Muscovites fired their city in his very teeth, as might be said, and forced his retreat from the scorched and blasted earth. This, of course, was long after my earthly pilgrimage; but I tell of what was told me beyond the grave by one who was an eye-witness of these events.

“A part of this army followed the course of the Vistula and reached the town of Czarnovice. The cold was intense, and there was neither food nor fires to be found in the hearths of the small townsfolk. The French officers therefore herded their wounded soldiers into the monastery, greatly to the consternation of the pious nuns, who were terrified to find their quiet cells and cloisters invaded by savage men—savage, even though wounded.

“Terrified though they were, the nuns were sufficiently worldly-wise to hide their sacred treasures and, naturally, their chief concern was for the lovely chalice of the Blessed Barbara. More than for its beauty and value, the nuns loved the sacred cup for its reputation; for many miracles had been performed by Saint Barbara in the name of the convent which had been dedicated to her. The superstitious nuns, who were human enough to love beautiful things, had come to associate these miracles with the chalice. One of the young nuns alleged she had dreamed of the very danger which had come to pass, and related that, in her dream, she had secreted the holy cup in a tiny room behind a picture of the Virgin which hung in the great refectory. The nuns believed their sister and she was allowed to take the chalice into the tiny room. It should be explained that the eyes of this picture were cut out, so that the eyes of a living person could take the place of the original, painted eyes.

“Whatever use these peep-holes may have served, it turned out to be a blessed foresight; for it saved the chalice and the convent itself from depredation by the rough soldiery. The good sister had hardly hidden herself behind the picture when in tramped the soldiers, who sprawled about at their ease and prepared to spend the night in the refectory and offices. The sister stared in fear and trembling through the eyes of the picture at the unwonted spectacle of unpriestly men defiling the convent by their very presence. While several soldiers were searching round for loot one of them happened to glance up at the picture of the Holy Virgin. To his horror he saw the eyes light up, as watching him. He moved away in doubt but they followed him. He shouted to the others and they, too, saw what to their superstitious fears was the Virgin come to life—at least as far as concerned her eyes. With oaths and shouts and fearfully crossing themselves, they stumbled and shuffled out of the room, declaring that not one of them would pass the night there.

“So here again was a direct ‘miracle’ wrought by the Blessed Barbara for

THE CHALICE OF KNUTHOWNA

the preservation of her holy chalice; for who but their powerful and revered St. Barbara could have put a horde of soldiery to flight! Next morning the chaplain gave thanks to God at the morning mass; but silver vessels were used lest the soldiers should come to know that they had altar vessels of beaten gold."

CHAPTER XV
PHILIPPE DE CHAMPAIGNE

HERE there seemed to be a break in the continuity of the recitals; an interruption by common assent; for there was quite a stir caused by the sliding of tankards, mugs and glasses across the table, the gliding of graceful flagons in the delectable process of replenishment. It is not, apparently, only he that talks who has the privilege of thirst. I have observed that to listen with attention has at times a parching tendency on the tongue, and therefore the rolling out of barrels, pipes, casks, hogsheads or rundlets is a phenomenon closely associated with the primary needs of existence itself, not to be incontinently charged to the account of a good-natured and ever-grinning Bacchus.

It was in the midst of such a diversion that my lord Abbot, whose temperate habits were obvious from the size and state of his glass, rose from his seat and moved behind the thronging figures at the table till he came opposite the *Presentation at the Temple* hanging on the wall where the corridor and stairs adjoin. He had clearly been attracted to this fine painting which, dominating as it is in size, is such as to give pause for consideration in any company. So thought the Abbot; for after a steady stare at the ecstatic expression of St. Simeon holding the Holy Babe in his arms, and with an eye wandering in wonder over the amazing clarity, depth and purity of the gracious blue robe of Mary, he took advantage of a lull in the hubbub going on round the table and turned to the company:

"My friends," he said, nodding and smiling to himself at the semi-guilty looks of several caught in the act of "brimming" their glasses and tankards, "we have here a remarkable picture. I had never imagined that such purity of colour could be found to set on canvas, and, moreover, to remain thereafter untouched by Time. It is incomprehensible to me; but nevertheless it is so. And the gracious beauty of the figures!" My lord Abbot sighed and shook his head: "I would say that its perfections are the result of evolution—evolution of thought; like all things to which man turns his hand in times of peace. The trend is ceaselessly towards greater beauty and intensification of spirituality." The old man bent and stared hard through his horn-glasses at the corner of the painting. Then he announced, slowly, as he faced the company, "*Philippe de Champaigne pinxit*. I seem to remember having heard the name of this great artist called by the *boettler*?"

Here Philippe de Champaigne was seen to rise. He left his seat at the middle of the table facing the "great salt" (which Isaac Sutton had replaced to my



THE PRESENTATION AT THE TEMPLE
by Philippe de Champaigne

PHILIPPE DE CHAMPAIGNE

great satisfaction) and joined my lord Abbot with a deep and gracious bow. Raibolini also rose; but only to rap on the table and lift a hand to quell the hubbub which, it seemed, was breaking forth. He raised mobile eyebrows above eyes which glanced expressively from the two men by the picture of the *Presentation* to his neighbours; thus indicating that another story was in the making. Then he sat down, doubtless feeling full of virtue at having attracted the company's attention, now bent upon perhaps the greatest painter of France of the period prior to Louis XIV.

A handsome man indeed he was; for though his features were large, yet there was a touch of refinement in the bend of the nose, in the shapely lips of the large mouth, in the pronounced chin, cleft and beautifully rounded. His hair was parted precisely in the middle; combed smooth to eye-level and then allowed to fall in wave and inconsequent curl upon his shoulders. His eyes, again, were steady and a little aloof in expression; yet softened by the faintest of obliquities from the perfectly horizontal. The effect of this suggested droop was kindly and yet it would need corroboration before you should trust to it; for, of a sooth, this characteristic has led both men and women astray many a time. De Champaigne, however, had many a "corroborative" to espouse the cause of character; for a kinder and more honourable man in his day was not to be found. A short but voluminous waist-length poncho-cloak was round his shoulders. He hitched a fold of it over one arm as he indicated points of his picture.

"Yes, indeed—my work: a work achieved not so long ago as much that I see around me, but long enough to have faced up to the test of time. Three hundred years have passed since this picture was painted—yet I tell you, my lord Abbot, that not a fraction of the original colour has been lost. That, indeed, amazes me and rejoices my heart; for it means that the fame of first-class artists shall be safeguarded for many centuries into the future, that is if they have employed sound methods of painting.

"The original version of this painting was designed for the church of the Faubourg St. Jacques in the time of the famous Sieur Desroches, Canon of the Carmelite Convent; the Sieur being at that time, in 1656, one of the chief dignitaries of the Church resident in Paris. I was then married to the beautiful Catherine; daughter of Duchesne, Director of Decorations to the great Marie de' Medici. Through this happy marriage I stepped into the shoes of my respected father-in-law. Later, I became Painter to the King and held a like appointment to the Queen Mother.

"It was a great joy to me that not only was I well favoured in Court circles, but had gained the respect and patronage of the Church; for, indeed, how else should I have obtained the commission of the critical Sieur Desroches to beautify his church? Of my work therein little remains. The church itself has long disappeared; but two paintings remain: one my *Nativity of the Virgin* and the other the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*.

"Ah, my friends, I can look back and realise that this was the outstandingly happy period of my life, in which I had the opportunity to develop the devotional

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

side of my spirit by expressing in a sacred environment concepts of beauty and adoration as an oblation to the Church. The whole building was mine to adorn and embellish as I would. I knew then a joy such as must have flowed into the heart of the incomparable Michelangelo when he was given a like commission to decorate the glorious chapel of St. Sixtus. Ah, could you but have seen my church when the whole was finished—finished to leave me, for the time being at least, drained of conception, void of further ambition, content merely to stand and gaze at what I had accomplished. That, my friends, as you all know in your kind hearts, is the moment of irrepressible conceit and indescribable gratitude of the artist, when what he has attempted is found—good.

“There were many who would condone in me this pardonable conceit; for thousands from all parts of Europe came to see—to wonder at and to be gripped by the pageant of the whole and then to look within themselves, in their harmless prejudices and experiences, and criticise. Some thought my colours too bright, my style too modern, and spoke of the prodigious virtuosity at which the great Rubens had so successfully aimed; which is as much as to say that for the moment of their criticism they forgot they were in the House of God. Then they came, insensibly, to perceive the continuity of the story told in form and colour, the devotional purpose which lay beneath the work—the truth of revelation translated in symbol and adoration and oblation and, I trust, to feel the humility of the artist. It was gratifying to know that those who came as to a picture-gallery remained to pray. It was said of the Jesuits that they approved the opulence and sensuous appeal of Rubens. For my part, I sought to make the beautiful and inspired walk hand-in-hand with an austerity that should prove a vehicle of truth in the simpler as well as in the more sublime translations of that truth.

“I pray you let me talk a little of this painting which we have before us; for in talking of it I see again the spacious original and remember my long and arduous hours of work thereon. The *Presentation* which you see before you and which has been honoured by the notice of my lord Abbot, is one of two copies I made of the original which is now to be found in the Musée of my native town, Brussels. This copy I made to the order of a wealthy patron six years after the other copy, which now hangs in the Museum of Dijon, was completed. I was forty years of age when I made this replica”—he nodded at the painting, as though well-satisfied with his work. “I was thus at the full height of my capacities. Experience had become wedded to maturity: I had reached the apex of vigour. The aspirations of youth had settled into the deep convictions and content of middle age.

“I placed the chief actors in this episode of the life of the Virgin beneath the wide, classic portico of the Temple, in order that they should have ample space in which to breathe and move; for, to me, they are as persons caught in a moment of their experience. The broad steps leading upward; the atrium beyond; the doorway to the interior and the inner chamber itself, are all aids to this end. Thus, to use a colloquialism, did I set the stage for the Blessed Mother to come upon for her purification; bringing the anointed Son to the

Temple in accordance with the strict Mosaic Law, She is accompanied by her spouse, Joseph, who carries the two white turtle-doves as a gift of the lowly to the Altar of Sacrifice.

"On the other side I represented the aged Simeon, who had come forth to take the Child, as foretold in ages past, in his old arms, gazing up the while in a rapture of holiest joy to the heavens' glory. Look long and with reverent eyes and waiting ears, and you will almost *hear* his voice rise in the *Nunc Dimittis*—that song of purest thankfulness, destined to sound down the centuries of after time, words of an incomparable Faith, in which he, Simeon, had come to share as heritor of the Old Dispensation. 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation.'

"Behind the venerable Simeon comes the eighty-four-years-old prophetess Hannah of the tribe of Asher, who had long served in the Temple, waiting in faith for this preciously foretold moment. She joins Simeon in giving thanks to the Most High. Then, to make up the harmony of the whole, I added other figures; even the likenesses of one or two of my personal friends whose characters made them worthy of this honour. The composition, you will see, is lit by a broad ray of sunlight coming from the left, which is intended to throw shadows and catch the highlights of the painting as a whole.

"As a boy I can remember the stir which the great painter Rubens made when in 1608 he returned from an eight-years' sojourn in Italy, bringing with him those brilliant colour-schemes which he had learned of the Titians and the Veroneses. What a *furore* he created in the world of Art when he came to Paris and painted the glories of the Court of Marie de' Medici in those four-and-twenty stupendous creations destined to hang in the vast galleries of the Louvre! At that time I had not yet come to France; but when I did achieve this adventure, and my secret ambition at the same time, I learned much from the study of these masterpieces. The strong chiaroscuro—the suggestion of the dimension of depth, which I hope you may perceive in my paintings; these 'tricks', if you like to call them so, derive from the Italian school; some say, originally, from Caravaggio. I followed these principles because, to me, they ministered to the truth in making one's form and colour more closely akin to the verities in life. Is it not the essence of a good painting that the characters should *live*?

"My name is the same as that of the County of one of the most renowned wines of France; yet I fear you will find little of that delightful nectar either in me or in my work. I know my limitations; and if you seek for sunshine, gaiety, wit; the frolics of Venuses, Cupids, or the nymphs and dryads of mythology, you must look rather to the aery genius of those who came after me and whose lives were passed in a very different world of thought from mine. I refer you to the gracious Watteau; to the incomparable Boucher, and to that blender of poetry and song, of abandonment and restraint—Fragonard. These aspects of the world of Art are not for me. Rather is it my pride that men have spoken of me as the last of the great religious painters of the French Renaissance. I think that therein lies a truth, and in that truth lies a searching criticism of the France of my time. Already religious fervour had suffered and was at a low

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

ebb; observance and practice of its tenets with many were but perfunctory. The Church itself in France had drooped and lost the power to inspire. Certain of its leaders were schismatics, if not, in secret, little better than unbelievers.

"Thus you will realise the moral state of France when Louis XIV came to strut across the stage of history with his brilliantly superficial grandeur. La Belle France—a country which I had come to love—too easily reflected the superficialities of her monarch, in manners, mode and, I am unhappy to say, in religion. The surrender of Art to these impulses was not long delayed; for artists and craftsmen must live, and to live, must flatter and reflect the mode; and the mode was largely exemplified in a certain wild beauty which, to me, seemed both pagan and profane; though infinitely fascinating, particularly to the young. Well do I remember the first, and then uncorrected, effect of the brilliant forms and precious colouring of the men of the School of Venice on my impressionable mind. Later, the balance, if I may so term it, of my nature reasserted itself and I inclined more and more to that which is blent of the spiritual and devotional in pictorial Art. Every artist who can set aside the influence of vogue and fashion knows in his heart the way of Art to which he is called. That is the road which at all costs he should follow.

"Efforts to combat the laxity of the times were made by Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres, who made a great impression on me, and had a strong influence on my paintings. Not only in the Court of France but in the Church itself, a canker was at work—a canker, which in the absence of self-discipline and consciousness of the true faith, its implications and obligations, ate deeply into the heart of economic and religious life. Bishop Jansen was a good Catholic, and so was I. The concept of the Church to us was life, but we believed in our hearts that pious Christians could not do better than follow the teachings of the great Augustine, an opinion with which of course the astute followers of St. Ignatius de Loyola did not agree, as it inevitably implied a loss to them of temporal and spiritual powers.

"Church and State in France were complementary, and both were open to exploitation by individual, or, maybe, by party interest. Thus the pure teachings of St. Augustine might be permitted for the masses, but not for leading religious centres of influence, such for example as Port Royal.

"Port Royal was heart and soul for Augustinian austerity, or rather, simplicity, as we preferred to call our attitude towards God and Man and to one another. Port Royal came under the frowns of Church and State alike; but within my considerable experience—from long association with this community of God-fearing pious Catholics—these good people, under the saintly leadership of Mère Angélique Arnaud, were as an oasis in a desert of desolation. They had the spirit which might have saved France; but that spirit was as a lone voice crying in the wilderness. France in all her expression of national life was fast pressing into that *dolce far niente* which eventually supplanted Christianity by rationalism, and in the appalling reaction of a too-swift awakening led her rulers and their kind to the guillotine of the Revolution.

"Bishop Jansen died in 1638. In the same year I was widowed by the passing

PHILIPPE DE CHAMPAIGNE

of my saintly wife. My daughter Catherine was then but a child. Also, I had lost my dear friend St. Cyran. A few years later my daughter joined the austere community at Port Royal under Mère Angelique, the Abbess. It came upon me that Life was slowly thrusting me into a background of disillusionment and disappointment by thus loosening one by one those earthly bonds in the absence of which existence has but little to offer.

"It is not given to all to achieve; but it is, I feel, given to all to attempt. Who can measure success, or failure, by true values? Success and failure and even the yardstick of values are one and all in a continual state of flux and change. It seemed to me that in trying to achieve in my paintings expression of my faith in God and man I had succeeded in a way where the concepts of policies, factions and violence had failed. I had wrought in a sphere where the brief passions of materialism are not. In so doing I had gained peace and, in my degree, shall I not have brought the peace of contemplation and meditation to thousands who down the centuries have gazed upon my work and found it good?"

The courtly painter of the seventeenth century bowed as he finished his speech and offered his arm to my lord Abbot in order that he should be escorted with befitting honour to his place by the fire. The Abbot laid a thin hand on the arm extended to him. Once again, in the light of blazing logs and amidst the revellers, he turned and thanked de Champaigne for his courtesy. That gentleman bowed his acknowledgments and rising to his full height at the Abbot's side looked round the company as if it were his province to select that gentleman to whom should fall the task of carrying on the life-stories of the artists. At this moment he was gently tapped on the shoulder, and turned to look down upon a smallish figure with long, thin hair hanging in disarray upon his shoulders, and features which were so over-emphasised by the thinness of the face that it was clear to all he bore the stamp of a severe wasting disease. This unhappy man of the brilliant eyes, the flushed ivory skin and the magnificent costume of the Regency—the ermine-lined surcoat open at the front to show embroidered undercoat and frilled and well-laced shirt—was the immortal Watteau.

CHAPTER XVI
ANTOINE WATTEAU

WATTEAU looked round on the company with a faint smile, his features sharply defined beneath his skin of ivory. He had been wandering round the room from one picture to another and had halted for a time in front of Champaigne's *Presentation in the Temple*.

Alas, poor Watteau! I recalled his sad history as I stared at him from my vantage point in the shadows. There may be something to be said for the proverbial "short life and a merry one"; but Watteau could hardly be cited as an example. His life was short enough indeed, since he lived but thirty-seven years; yet in the second clause of the proverb he fails to qualify, for his persistent ill-health could not have permitted any of the abandon which in his days was obligatory if one would earn the description "merry".

As I saw Watteau in my dream he resembled more or less faithfully the Watteau portrayed by various painters. Phthisis carried him off. The symptoms of that fell disease were to be read in his lineaments. His eyes were unnaturally large, feverishly bright and very beautiful, almost ethereal in their expression and seeming to look into the heart of a distant world. His nose was long and finely shaped, and his mouth the mouth of a sensualist, red and richly curved. But against this might be set the small rounded chin and general air of melancholy woven within the harmony of features. Sensuous, but not sensual, Watteau in life dared not waste his strength on dissipation, or, maybe, even seek the normal satisfaction of the healthy appetite; his precious strength was needed for his work. I noticed how thin was his long hair; thin and fine—like silk. He was splendidly dressed, though more sedately than Boucher. His dresscoat of plain velvet was richly lined with ermine, and his undercoat and linen were exquisitely fine. Evidently Watteau in his quiet way had been somewhat of a dandy in his best days. When he spoke, his voice was thin and high; it had sweetness without volume, yet carried well. He made obeisance to the Abbot, who raised a benignant hand from his place by the fire.

"My lord Abbot, and kind friends, it is I, Antoine Watteau, who am at last forced to speak in this company where so many more eloquent than I have told their stories. I have neither the *élan* of Signor Perugino, nor the *aplomb* of Monsieur Philippe de Champaigne; therefore shall I pray you patience for my hearing." The murmur of assent from all quarters was reassuring. Watteau smiled his deep, sad smile, and continued:

"I was a son of Valenciennes and my name is pure Walloon. I need hardly

ANTOINE WATTEAU

say, therefore, that I was an intense admirer of Rubens, as indeed were all artists of my time. Yet it is to Paris that I owe the moulding of my art, which I think I may say found its truest expression in what were called *fêtes galantes*. At the same time my work covered a wide field in three outstanding *genres*: episodes in military life; theatrical scenes and, of course, my *fêtes galantes*.

"I am afraid, gentlemen, that I was a living problem for the critics. Why I do not know, except that the accusation that I was persistently elusive in all my work may have been true. They had so little to catch hold of in my schemes of composition. Perhaps they looked obstinately for what was not there, except in such vagueness as to be indefinable, and they could hardly expect me to help them. Frequently in my painting I found myself so *distrain* that I seemed to be working on a mirage of light and colour, but, even for me, the fantasy had little meaning and certainly no moral or lesson. Then one must remember that experience sharpens the tools of all the arts, and of actual intimate experience of much that life has to give I had little store. The grandeur of the soldier attracted me; but what did I know of the soldier's life or of the horrors of war! Instinctively I shrank from the ugly and coarse; hence my military canvases have very little real war in them; and it is the same with my theatrical scenes—always there crept in that elusiveness and, if I may say so, that inconclusiveness which comes into its own in my *fêtes galantes*.

"I came to Paris with the dawn of the eighteenth century—the Paris which for years had been my dream and ambition. I was not alone in sensing the coming change from a strict formalism in Art, as in other matters, to freedom of expression and that precious trait which is so essentially French; I refer to the Frenchman's love for the subtleties and finer shades of life which are so often ignored in adhering to the purely academic. You will do well to remember that in their clever formalism the court painters of Louis XIV were not, even in his days of outstanding influence, by any means all the world.

"Other painters to whom court ceremony was anathema had their own ideas of Art, and naturally they were subtly antagonistic to the classic trend of the time. Rubens had been the leader in this revolt, if I may use so realistic an expression in describing a departure from the views of the masters of the old school of thought such as Raphael, Poussin, and others. Rubens fought for the *Baroque* style because therein he found liberation for his mighty gifts of poetry, imagination, and the underlying sensuousness of life; and I, who so worshipped that great man, absorbed and took his teachings into the more subtle and delicate world which in turn I sought to make my own.

"I have said that when I came to Paris I had already sensed the coming change in art, literature and music; for the change, gradual though it was, was fundamental. Of course, Paris gave the lead to the world; otherwise she would not have been Paris—at least, not *my* Paris. The days of vast, classic paintings on walls and ceilings were coming to an end; which infers that the influence of the Court had for several years been on the wane. Paris outside Court influence, slowly came into her own. Not only were the nobles building fine homes in the city, but the increasing prosperity of the bourgeoisie was

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

finding expression in the new Faubourgs, lined with pretentious baroque houses. The rich bourgeoisie struggled to 'arrive' in society and frequently succeeded; for they possessed that which is eloquent when all else is silent—money.

"Such changes meant a wide and general adaptation of new ideas of life generally. Women regained their lost kingdom*; the incentive of Art was to please and present joy and light to patrons rather than to overawe them and teach them. The emotional intruded on the intellectual, as warmth will drive out cold.

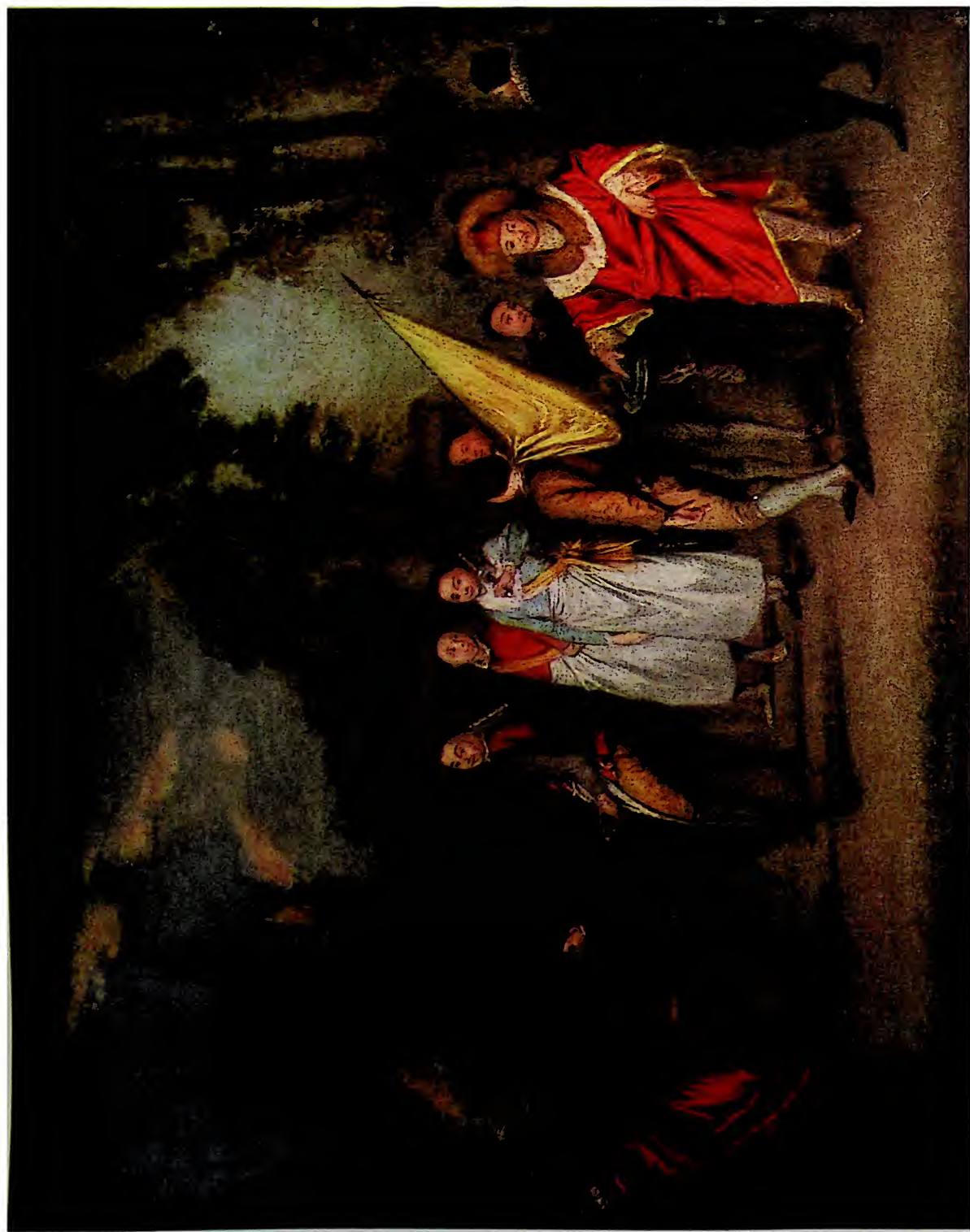
"I have said that I loved Paris. Yet in my early days how frequently my dreams fell in fragments about me! Though I was but nineteen, I considered myself experienced in the world of painting, and was conceited enough to feel assured of a niche in the great city's realm of art. Alas, the cruelties of a merciless world seemed to be concentrated in my tiny corner of the capital! A youth such as I, without money or influence, has first to live; and to live one has to find work; to find work is hard when there are so many after the one job and hack painters are to be found at ten for a sou. Ah, my friends, I know the bitterness of poverty—the denial even of the right to eat!

"The Pont Notre Dame! I would never forget it in a hundred lives! Ten hours hard work a day for a daily plate of soup and three livres a week! I can say with honesty, gentlemen, that those three livres and what they stood for in the way of deprivation and misery, encouraged, if they did not actually sow the seeds of, the fearful disease which robbed me of at least half my earthly years. However, even working for my master did not prevent me from labouring for myself; for my one relaxation was to study, study, and still study the thousand lights and facets of Paris—her nobly dressed men and lovely women. Such an immensity of practice, I am sure, gave me a technical ease and a facility with my brush which was soon to earn me fame.

"When I left my wretched quarters on the Pont Notre Dame of bitter memory, I went to Monsieur Gillot and gained some improvement in my conditions of living. By this employer I had my attention drawn to the theatre, and through him I advanced both in technique and to fresh outlooks on my art.

"It was my further good fortune, when I left that master, to gain another much more influential and kindly. I speak of Monsieur Claude Audran, who was an excellent artist, and who, from the early years of the eighteenth century, had held the enviable post of concierge of the famous Luxembourg Palace, which had been built for Marie de' Medici. Through this master I was lifted from the depths to the heights of an artistic environment. I cannot speak highly enough of the value of Monsieur Audran to my work. My teachers designed tapestries for the Gobelins and employed me for this type of work, than which I know of no better training in the exquisitely light use of the brush so essential to the intricate details of the best work for tapestries; beside developing a true appreciation of ornamentation where ornament is the essence of work in hand.

* The power they had enjoyed in the early age of Chivalry, inspired by the Provençal *troubadours* and their disciples, the French *trouvères*.



LE DOCTEUR
by Antoine Watteau

ANTOINE WATTEAU

'Magnificent' was the word accorded to my thirty decorations in Turkish and Chinese styles. For this and other work which I executed in the Château de la Muette, I was credited with possessing a gift of subtle invention and (who would think it to see my hand-dog countenance?) a delightful humour!

"You will remember the mighty labours of Rubens for Marie de' Medici, the 'Life' of this great lady which he commemorated in a glorious series of paintings constituting a system of decorative beauty than which nothing finer is to be seen in the whole world. I think that from the first moment of seeing these paintings I came to know the trance-state of the artist, in which the self is sublimated to a condition of ecstasy—a condition which, gentlemen, remained with me, in varying degrees of intensity all my life.

"A painter can owe much to one picture, one at which he can gaze and still gaze, and then departing carry it, an image of glory and colour, in his mind; and return to it again and again for the feast which never palls. Such a picture was Rubens' *Garden of Love* to me, Antoine Watteau, who before I had come to intimacy with the works of Rubens had deemed myself a painter! You will see, gentlemen, that if I kept my conceits, I also had my humilities; and they were more intense than the flarings of vanity, which in my heart I knew were but efforts to hide from myself the consciousness of my shortcomings and my lack of faith in myself—that is, until I had come to comprehend Rubens.

"Ah, this *Jardin d'Amour*—a living, palpitating world of men and women abandoned in Bacchic mirth to the joy of the hour in which they drink and love. The exquisite flesh and the intricate interweaving of the texture and colour of robe and drapery made a harmony so perfect that the sense of rhythm therefrom *sang* in my ears as a magnificent symphony will sing in the mind of the musician when the finished score he studies is a masterpiece. This rich, sensual atmosphere teeming with life was not for me to emulate, though my senses responded to every note of it; but it gave me the grand scheme of life abandoned to love and pleasure, and you will find the notes of it in many, many of my best paintings.

"Despite my work with Monsieur Audran I was able to follow the classes at the Academy and had fixed my ambitions on the Prix de Rome, which carried with it a sojourn in the Eternal City. This was in the year 1709. The prize came near, but not near enough. I was awarded the second prize and had to suffer not only disappointment but the knowledge that a young painter, far inferior to myself in capacity, had been deemed my superior.

"This and other matters did not help to improve my nature, which frankly, I realised was temperamental. Those who helped young artists always seemed to be hungry for a display of gratitude as a *personal* matter. I could never see things in this light. To help a man of genius is, or should be, a privilege in itself: friendship should have nothing to do with it. Indeed it is quite possible that the worthy patron without his money and influence might be the last man to appeal to the artist as a friend. It is unfortunate that the patron should so frequently desire the *quid pro quo*: but the fact is so—unless my experiences have been exceptional.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

"Also, there is that rock on which the vessel of friendship between a teacher and his pupil can so easily split—work produced by the pupil which stirs the gall and jealousies of the master. That was the way of it between Claude Audran and me. I had painted several small pictures which aroused his envy. The jealousy of Monsieur Audran was not perhaps without justification.

"It was true what they said of me—that my war was not real war; that my theatrical themes were not of the veritable theatre; and my *fêtes galantes* elusive with an undercurrent of melancholy in the midst of gaiety. I could not help these intrusive phases of my nature from showing in my work. They were with me for good or ill.

"The most beneficent gift which the Gods can set, like a sparkling jewel, in the firmament of the aspiring artist is the rich and kindly patron. He can open the door to everything desired by ambition, enthusiasm, love of beauty and the fulness of life, which things are the artist's birthright—a birthright which the cruelties of the world would, perchance, deny him in his poverty; but from which the generosity and insight of the true patron of Art can save him. It was a most fortunate moment for me, therefore, when Monsieur Sirois conceived the idea of introducing me to the famous collector, Pierre Crozat. Monsieur Crozat liked my work and at once gave me commissions.

"But the greatest benefit of my art which grew out of my association with Crozat was access to his collection of paintings. For the first time I was brought into touch with the masterpieces of the great Venetians. What I could not learn of atmosphere from Rubens, I absorbed from incomparable masters such as Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, and others of the Giorgionesque school. Indeed, for that delicacy of thought and touch which was to be the *leit motif* of my *fêtes galantes* these artists were the perfect source and fountain. From them and from the calm beauty of their lyrical compositions I developed that latent poetry which was within me, and came to express it in my works.

"I was not born of the *haut monde*; hence I had to study it. One does not obtain intimacy with any subject from a distance. Here, in addition to his Venetians, Monsieur Crozat served me well. To his château, for example, his exquisite country home in Ile-de-France, came the most notable personalities of the time; handsome men and lovely women—particularly women, for they were ever the *ignis fatuus* which I sought to grasp, analyse and bring within my grasp to the service of Art. My intense study of the *haut monde* of my time seemed to bring out the feminine traits in my own self, for I had to get closely *en rapport* with them, in order to interpret them. I learned much of their characteristics and idiosyncracies; aye, a volume of knowledge full of the most trifling and intimate detail which served me well in my *fêtes galantes* and in the hundreds of sketches I made of every possible attitude, in deportment and sartorial adornment. But of woman, herself, the eternal enigma, I knew little. I could, and did, weave gossamer threads about her and lift her to purest heights of poetic imagery, and sing of her and to her in form and colour, and my song was a true song; yet its echoes were not in the realities of this earth but in the empyrean

ANTOINE WATTEAU

of the painter's unsatisfied heart, in the mystical contest and desire which he himself cannot analyse.

"I created my own lovely world from the intangibilities which were about me. My world was the lovely world of the poet and the dreamer; but a world of pin-pricks and frustrations, regrets and lost opportunities. Nevertheless I painted on, earning the wages of the poet and the dreamer.

"Those who suffer as I suffered, are burned up either in the flesh or in the spirit. In either case their desires are insatiable: they would burn up the years even as they themselves—body and spirit—are consumed by the flames within. It was ever my nature to turn away from experience which could not readily be sublimated, or etherealised. Death, cruelty, uncleanness, unkindness, disease were around me; but in my world I could withdraw from such horrors and forget them, and forget, too, the fact that I was a victim to the last of these evils. To come to my own ethereal world I had, before all things, to paint. My work was the *open sesame* which led from darkness to light. Yet the flesh of me was listening to a different song, and my obedience to the higher call of the spirit was not yielded without bitter fights and heavy drains upon the complaining flesh.

"Never shall I forget my happiness in the great park of Monsieur Crozat's château at Montmorency, in the lovely country of the Ile de France, with its old-world hamlets, each surrounding its Gothic church, with the gentle-sleeping undulations of hill and dale, of climbing woodlands where the earth held the evasive scents of many summers . . . such memories would be with me for ever!

"Ah, yes, my friends, in retrospect I can truly, and with gratitude to my art, say that Monsieur Crozat was a gift from the Gods—he planted me in an earthly paradise and put the keys of it generously and without restraint in the hands of the humble artist, who being without a world had therefore to create a world of his own. His need was a garden as near Paradise as may be. . . . The history of mankind began in a garden. It were well that it should end in a garden.

"The dissolution of Louis XIV drew near. The last few years of his long reign were clouded over by the exhaustion of wars, an empty treasury and widespread misery amongst the people—the sun which had shone so brilliantly was obscured and all were impatient for another dawn to rise. Magically, the new life ran like a flame throughout France! It is not for me to criticise the amazing reaction from gloom to a radiance without parallel in the life of a people. To me it brought fresh inspiration. I could seize some moment of indefinable beauty in the untrammelled life of the *haut monde*. I was blind to the ugliness of impure humanity, and build therefrom my own happy and elusive world of poetry, music and etherealised passions.

"My friends wondered why I left the hospitable shelter of my patron's house. Let it be remembered that we parted as good friends—I grateful to him for much, and especially for the part the experience of my friendship with him had played in my work; and he, recognising and condoning the vagaries of the

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

artist—that restlessness which will not permit him to remain static even in the sense of his domestic economy. The urge came upon me for something different—even perhaps a change of environment not necessarily for the better. Call it a *Wanderlust*. At least, none can say that a mercenary motive ever moved me; for my good friend Monsieur Gersaint could have told you that I would sometimes throw him into a panic when a comfortable price had been offered for a picture, and I, because some later critical examination disclosed a fault, deliberately mutilated it. A man of commerce such as Gersaint regarded this as a form of madness. You, true artists, will understand. I remember on one occasion, so pleased was I with a new wig that when the maker asked for a small painting instead of money I painted for him two considerable works which would have fetched a high price had they been offered to my admirers.

“I have spoken, my friends, at some length of myself, and of my times, and tried your patience with my not altogether happy memories. Of my pictures—how should I speak individually when I made them in hundreds! I imagine that my *passport* to this present and impressive assembly of artists is there in the examples of my art upon the wall—my *Bal Champêtre* and *Le Docteur*. These pictures, and many of their kind in my later years, earned me the title of Painter of *Fêtes Galantes* and of *the Comedy*. This title, or label, meant, in effect, an association of my name with a gossamer-world of make-believe, which hung by the merest thread to materiality.

“In these *fêtes galantes* you will recognise the battered ship come to harbour—in my case indeed a very battered ship, for my disease was upon me; but the wreck of a human life had brought its charge to port at last. The pictures, here, bespeak the quality of the cargo. They epitomise that little world which towards the end of my life I made my own—my impossible world which was of the earth, yet not of the earth—which was neither fairyland nor dreamland, nor of the material contact of men and women.

“I made one or two copies of my *Bal Champêtre*; which proves that it was held in much admiration by patrons and public. Men have called my *Embarkation for Cytheria* my masterpiece, but this—my *Country Dance*—ranks high in my affections, otherwise I should not have made those copies. The idea came to me one sunny day in June when I sat beneath the colonnades in the gardens of the Tuileries—a day when my environment was so beautiful that phantasy and fact merged themselves curiously in my mind and the most concrete things became soft-toned and suggested an impermanence which had the quality of a mirage. I remember that I was merely idling, lazy and semi-dreaming in a state of *dolce far niente*, for my state of mind was negative. A delightful scene was present to my half-observant eyes: two practised dancers of the *minuet*, lured to the chequered pavement by the magic of lute-strings softly plucked by a gifted lutanist, swayed, turned and bent with graceful inclinings to the rhythm of the player; while gathered within the pillared colonnade was grouped an impressive party of ladies with their swains. The music sang with the singing of the murmurous fountains, which rose as rainbow-tinted spires in the sun that bathed the widespread view before me in a clarity and glory.

ANTOINE WATTEAU

"I strove to catch and hold in suspense a moment of this graceful dance and its delightful environment. The very air throbbed with youth and love and the inexpressible essence of both; and I caught one arrested moment in continued movement. The art of the painter can go no further; for the next moment, ever promised, never comes. The actors in this scene were unconscious that their action and, maybe, their hopes and pending delights were being, as it were, set to tones and harmonies *within* the music of lute and fountain. To them the dance was—just a dance; a dance to be repeated many times in their care-free lives under the charm of cultured movement by which they could express their youth and secret thoughts of love. For me, the artist, it meant the capturing of a moment of life which was ineffably beautiful and inspiring—a moment of impermanence which I aspired to make permanent: the easy and natural grouping of the radiant figures; the many-hued tones and textures of their dress; the grace of posture, both natural and poised in purposeful attitude, but ever with the desire to charm; the play of light and shade, never for a moment at rest since the breeze was wandering amongst the trees, stirring velvet and satin, lifting stray curls—while over all were the running harmonies of young life.

"Happy was I that my friends saw the beauty of this conception of the *Bal Champêtre*! They spoke of it in almost unmeasured praise. As I have said, I painted one or two copies of this theme. De Julienne, Director of the Gobelins, and my friend Gersaint, were enthusiastic about it; and I remember a prominent Councillor of Parliament who begged the honour of a copy—which was afterwards engraved by Scotin. For some time I kept the original, so much store did I set by the work.

"*The Embarkation for the Isle of Cytheria* was my reception-piece for the Academy. Well do I remember the reminders I had that my *morceau* should be sent in at once. I was made a member of the Academy in the year 1712. My painting was not presented until August 1717! Indeed, I would not be hurried. Yet it was eventually begun and finished within a week. Perhaps my dilatory mood was reflected in the little interest shown in my paintings by the overlords of the Academy. Still—was there not posterity and the hope of critics of greater vision? It was a symbol of the adventure and mystery and eternal inevitability of love, and of the journey to an earthly paradise—itsself a symbol of the *embarquement* for that further journey—to the Paradise beyond!

"I had little cause, however, to remember with pleasure my human and dolorous embarkation for England. A fortnight of wearying travel from Paris to London in early winter—the detestable winter of the English—was no fine prospect for a sick man. The life, the culture of the English? Ah, my friends, I would give you a hundred Londons for a single Paris. The sole merit of the English in the eyes of a French artist was their appreciation of an art in which they lagged far behind us—the art of painting. I could, therefore, kill, as the saying is, two birds with a single stone—see the great Doctor Mead, himself an ardent collector of *objets d'art*, and sell my own pictures; for at the time, I, for reasons peculiarly my own, needed money.

"Alas, the English doctor, though a pleasant companion and enthusiastic c

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

about my painting, could do my health little good; though he was first in the science of medicine in his country. I went to England a sick man to be cured. I returned to France—to die.

"Before I go to my place I would tell you of one other picture which ever held my love:

"If you would see a painting that is barely a painting because it is so ridden by the art of the sculptor, then you must gaze upon my *Gilles*. It is not a portrait of any living man; but rather a painting symbolic of all the male element in Italian comedy. And the light enveloping my *Gillies* is not that light to be found in the clarity of day, nor is it of the illuminate flow of the sailing moon. A smiling harlequin rides the wise-eyed donkey and other comedians play their parts, but the rôle of each and all in the picture is but as figures in a running frieze; for Gilles, standing against his background of pale sky and gently waving trees is paramount. Some have called this painting an enigma. If so, there is only one who knows the answer. . . ."

The great man—this valiant, desperate Watteau—this amazing mystic in the world of painters—paused and looked slowly round upon the company surrounding him and dwelling on his every word; for truly he had given no pause for them to reflect, so rapid and purposeful had been his speaking. His eye fell on Philippe de Champagne, whose earnest gaze might be said to envelop this frail man of northern France. Watteau smiled, and his smile was both an invitation and a challenge. "Come, Monsieur," he said, "you have seen here my fantastic work?" Philippe de Champagne nodded gravely, and answered:

"I have seen it, Monsieur. It hath an eternal majesty, where nothing of majesty is; it is of the theatre, yet of no theatre which is on this side of the Styx; it would seem to be a sly piece of pure comedy, yet one feels that it awaits the climax of tragedy; it is of earth, yet unearthly. Monsieur, I have gazed long on your masterpiece and felt—fear." Watteau regarded him for a moment and his eyes seemed to grow pale in their fading of distant thought. Then he said, very quietly:

"That is my opinion, Monsieur. Yet it does not answer my question: If my *Gilles* is an enigma, who knows the answer?" Philippe de Champagne could not brave the look of a fleeting soul in those pale eyes. His own eyes fell. Then he looked up and ejaculated—harshly: "*Gilles*".

Watteau seemed not to have heard; for he drew a laced handkerchief from within his vest and wiped away a slight sweat which had gathered upon his brow. He spoke no more. He bowed and seated himself.

CHAPTER XVII

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

BOUCHER, with his capacity to impress those around him with his unspoken, yet effective demand for attention, dominated without being dominant. His charm was immense and his manner delightful.

He brought the effulgence of that brilliant yet irresponsible period which is called the "Regency" into my home and transformed it; and those who were present he likewise transformed, despite themselves, so that they became eager listeners, reflecting his rapidly changing moods and striving to appreciate the subtle innuendoes which gesture wedded to words.

There are, of course, plenty of portraits of the immortal Boucher; I have one in mind that represents him as about twenty years old—painted by himself and, if I dare voice the suspicion, definitely flattering. If it is a true likeness then I do not wonder that the little girls of the opera fell over themselves to gain the attention of Boucher . . . the Bacchus of painters.

"*Ah, mes amis*; you would, of course, expect François Boucher to follow after our friend Watteau; just as you will expect my old pupil Fragonard here to rise and tell you what a fine fellow I was in my day, when his turn is come." Boucher, who, as I have explained, appeared as a young and handsome man, with powdered wig, cravat, and long, skirted, brocaded coat over exquisite linen, tapped Fragonard on the shoulder, and was rewarded by an upward glance full of friendship and understanding. Said Fragonard:

"If Fragonard follows Boucher it is only because Boucher cannot follow himself. We used to say that the incomparable François was like Cæsar's wife——" Boucher clamped a hand down on Fragonard's shoulder in decisive interruption.

"Enough, my Frago; I pray you do not prejudice my learned friends against me before I start. *Afterwards*, I am at your mercy——"

"*Now* we are at yours," chimed in his friend, "and are like to get a sorry deal." Fragonard was an old man and grey of hair; but his grey-blue eyes of Provence twinkled as Boucher pushed him away with playful disgust and waved a graceful hand at the Company.

"I beg you, Messieurs, do not let the jealousies of a painter who imitated all painters and all schools and yet remained himself, prejudice you against my humble self. We shall come to Monsieur Fragonard later on, and I may have a few little confidences to tell by way of riposte; for never yet in the cut-and-thrust of badinage did he get the better of me; eh, Frago, my friend?"

"Never!" agreed Fragonard; but in such a sepulchral tone that the company

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

laughed aloud. Even the Abbot could not hold back a smile, lost though he was in wonder at his fellow-countrymen of the early eighteenth century. "I am reminded," continued Fragonard blandly, "of Boucher's temporary—very temporary—conversion from the joys of the flesh to unhappy thoughts of his soul and its—doubtful future. He perceived the sins of mythology and the virtues of religion and strove to paint out the sins of the past. When asked from what disease he was suffering, he lifted his eyes to heaven, sighed and said, 'I found repentance'. Is it not so, François?"

Boucher's charming smile faded and he actually seemed to take on an air foreign to his appearance in its suggestion of seriousness. "Very true; very true. Ah, me! doubtless I should have achieved my salvation; but it was not to be—my paintings would not have it. Do you know, my friends, that I would paint Angels and take every care to clothe them in meekness. But next morning—they would all have turned into Cupids and Nymphs, saucy and utterly irresponsible. The same with my 'Virgins'; leave them overnight and they would change into enticing Venuses, Hebes and Dianas by the morning. It was terrible! What use to be so earnest and sincere in my heart when the Devil himself took charge of my hand and so mixed my paints and misused my draughtsmanship that my Holy Marys looked like *cocottes* and *grisettes*! There was nothing for it; either I had to give up painting, or yield up my religious ambitions. The choice I made is a page in the history of Art; and probably accounts for my not being now on the same plane with that rascal, Fragonard, in what we used to call the 'next world'.

"I suppose you would be right in regarding me as precocious. Well, I was a *Parisien* of the *Parisiens*—born in Paris, of Parisian parents, in the very shadow of the Louvre; for my father's shop was close by the entrance to the apartments of the Queen. Paris—the centre of the World! Paris—where all things most desirable in life were in vast abundance, and whence radiated the finest works and theories of Art and Culture. Every Parisian was precocious in the midst of precocity, or as our detractors would say—preciosity. I have been accused of being artificial—theatrical—in my work, and there may be something in the charge; for my early childhood was passed in the gardens and palaces around me and amidst the pageants of Church and State in the later days of *le Grand Monarque . . . le Roi Soleil*! These things were very beautiful, of course, but in no way natural, or of the tangled beauty of the wild. The Jesuits used to say in my time, before their silly quarrel with the Pompadour, 'give us the first seven years of the child's life and we have the man'. That is an unquestionable truth; Paris having had my childhood—Paris with all her artificialities and superficial beauties—held my adolescence, my manhood and my maturer years for all the days of my life on earth!

"I was one of those who stepped out of the stately *régime* of Louis Quatorze into the period of the Regency which, as most of you know, grew to its height in the reign of that handsome and debonair Louis who at five years of age joined lustily in the cry of '*Vive le Roi*' with the cheering crowds—who cheered the more because their little king found it well to cheer himself.



HYMEN AND LOVE

by François Boucher

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

"Some say that I, François Boucher, was made famous by my environment, in which pleasure, luxury and license were the high-sounding notes. That is as much as to say that in any other environment I would not have found my *métier*—that in a serious world I should have been—a boor! Let me assure you, my friends, that that view is wrong, based though it may be on the conclusion that I was the one who most accurately reflected his surroundings and the mentality of his compatriots. Having that gift of sensitivity to my environment, would I have lost it had my world been colder and greyer? I think not; for an artist is himself under any *régime* and his powers of adaption are unlimited; the sole, unchanging condition being that he should be *allowed to paint*. Undermine his powers with persistent poverty, and you prevent him from expressing himself in the only medium which he can command.

"You will ask—what did the prosperous François Boucher know of poverty? Do you think that eyes which can measure the perfect proportions of a body, or any other object, a mind which can faithfully reflect certain characteristics of his fellows would be blind to the darker side of life? Ah, no; your painter, musician, poet and sculptor see and know life *as a whole*. Their job is to select those constituents of life, which they need for their work as a chef selects the ingredients of a perfectly balanced meal.

"Well, well; we will have done with our seriousness, lest you mistake me for an Englishman, which God forbid! I am perhaps not quite fair to the English, for in my time there lived at least one very fine gentleman who had the lamentable misfortune to be English. Ah; to what limitless heights that man might have risen had he had the blessing of being born a Frenchman! His name was Joshua Reynolds and he held the rank of Chevalier, or of some such honour in his own country, where he was a great man both as a painter and a writer. This so courteous monsieur came to see me in my apartments in the Louvre—the *Louvre*, I repeat, for François Boucher had come to the glorious palace of all the kings of France! . . . an honour that turned Diderot green with envy and hate! Well, well; he has perhaps had time since then to be ashamed of his pettiness.

"But to return to this Englishman: he found me in my studio at work either on *The Rising of the Sun*, or *The Setting of the Sun*, it matters not which. He studied my work for a long time. An Englishman cannot, of course, think and talk at the same time, and I had almost forgotten he was there. Then he asked me, after looking searchingly round the room to see that I was not playing my tricks on him and hiding half a dozen models behind my stacked pictures, how it was possible that I could design such a complicated picture without any models. What had I done with the men and women, in the life, who must have been posing for me? I staggered this great and laconic Englishman by telling him the gospel truth, as the English would say, that I no longer needed models—my imagination could conjure up from memory and experience all that I needed of the flesh. He shook his head; admired my work profoundly, but could not get over the absence of models. I heard afterwards his prophecy—that I should find my method of working dangerous; for the continuous correc-

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

tion of the eye by the living model is necessary. Critics threw this quite sound remark—sound for the type of artist who might paint one little picture while I was painting a dozen large ones—at my head when age overtook me. But I would ask you to consider my two tributes to the Sun. Much of the work of these two paintings was done without models.”

Monsieur Fragonard half-turned and looked up at his friend, saying in agreement:

“Those two paintings are the best of their kind in the whole history of Art, François. They alone would give the lie for ever to your enemies, Diderot and Grimm . . . they are divine!” Boucher waved a graceful hand to the company, bowed and flirted a delicate lace handkerchief across his mouth.

“That is the criticism which speaks from love, Messieurs,” he continued; but Fragonard interrupted him:

“It speaks, Messieurs, rather from the pupil of a master so great, not only in his work but in his spirit, that he could say with supreme generosity of his pupil that the latter had become a greater artist than he—the master. The jealousy, the meanness often, of artists is common knowledge; but that a master should say such words of a pupil *and mean every word in his heart* is something more than mere temporal greatness . . . it is the greatness of the Gods and its generosity, I say, is almost super-human.” The fervour with which Fragonard uttered these blunt words—his voice was harsh and resounding—made a profound impression on the company. Some nodded reflectively at Boucher, as much as to say they were glad to know of his acquaintance with the virtues. Boucher, himself, was nonplussed—a rare experience, one might suppose, for him; for if ever a man had *aplomb* and the ready defence of the incisive riposte it was he. He was clearly touched; and loathed to have the fact noted . . . a man of his period to be forced to admit by his demeanour that he had a heart! The idea was preposterous. So he coughed, frowned down at Fragonard, and then laughed lightly—a laugh that was a jingle of artificiality and insincerity. It was the sort of absurd mannerism one would expect of a man practised in disguising his inner self from an affected and sardonic world. He clapped his hand down hard on Fragonard’s shoulder and slightly shook it as though in irritation.

“Tut, tut,” said he, “where are we getting with my story that Fragonard should make up fairy-tales about it! My detractors love to say that before I was out of my adolescence I was a dissipated young rascal. To this I would retort that I was no better and no worse than the rest of the wild, pleasure-loving youths of those days. But, I pray you, consider the work that wild young ‘rake’ did! Rare was the day in which I failed to do my ten hours’ hard work, and that does not leave much room for dissipation.

“Some said that I, François Boucher, had no heart. How should they say otherwise when one’s most strenuous efforts were devoted to keeping that inconvenient organ well below the surface. Perhaps there may have been a measure of truth in the accusation; though I can, with honesty, say that I suffered agonies on behalf of her whom I remember as the Sweet Maid of the Fruit-

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

shop: I first saw her with bare arms and luxuriant hair all untrammelled and flowing round her like a cloud. Her beauty was perfect innocence, ideal for the Holy Virgin which at that time I had a great desire to paint. She sat to me as model. We loved and were—lost. Then another face moved across the canvas—the face of a woman of fashion and a sophisticated beauty. I forgot the pure and serene features and lowly state of the girl in the fruit-shop, and ignored her gentle protests that I had vowed never to forget, as is so often the way with youth. Then the new face palled and the shallow character of a *femme du monde* became bared to me. I sought for my innocent one to ask forgiveness. She could not forgive; nor could she forget. She had died—of love, they said; died of love as one dies at eighteen—of a broken heart! Her mother asked for her portrait, then unfinished. It was never finished. It had power many years after to bring tears to these hard eyes of mine that so rarely wept.

“The men loved my women, and the women loved themselves in the airy beauty in which I strove to clothe them in my paintings. The art of the Regency—artificial, fantastic . . . nature as nature never was! All such criticisms may have their foundations in truth; yet I painted what I felt, and meant to give happiness and detachment from toil and troubles; for if to-morrow we die, let the present be for eating and drinking and love and the delights of the senses. What has your glum-faced anchorite to show for his self-inspired pains and delusions? He has hoarded and lost. We of the Regency, too, lost, maybe; but we had the full joy of spending and lived every moment of our lives. None of us regretted our laughter and song and our loving and singing; and, reborn, we would have re-lived our time again with joy and pride in the wonderful Bacchic spirit of those happy days.

“My friend, Carl van Loo, and I went to Rome. They said I could not appreciate the beauties of Raphael and Michelangelo, but they were wrong, Messieurs. These great men were not of the Regency—of my world, in which I determined to stand high. But they could, and did, teach me much of line and colour.

“I may say that I painted many pictures while at the French Academy in the Eternal City. Inasmuch as I was nearly three years in Italy, I cannot have wholly escaped the influence of the great Italian artists, living and dead. I returned—to find myself as one who returns home after a painful absence. Ah! Versailles . . . where now thy crowded vastness, thy magnificence, thy brilliance, thy graces, thy famous names—all that made for majesty? There are great silences of blessedness. It is not these silences which speak in the re-echoed footsteps at Versailles . . . the storm builds up in the regions of night when the watchers sleep! Who can see the tiny cloud no bigger than a man's hand upon the horizon when he looks, like the proud eagle, full in the sun's eye! Few saw: none cared.

“Shall I tell you, Messieurs, that never was a man so favoured and loved as I, most unworthy of men, in my day; and loved of those whose regard was the highest of honours. I was no money-grubber, and money went as fast as it came in the vortex of gaiety and the happy cults of Venus and Bacchus. Had I wished

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

I could have been vastly rich. Well, well; with some of us lucky ones the money we throw to the winds to-day has cords upon it; for to-morrow we are amazed to find it returned to our pockets again. Money is like a fair wanton: who, if you seek her, flies; but she may come unbidden if you forget her.

"Thus in forgetting all about money and the need thereof, did I marry me a wife, and a good wife. And I married for love; for she had not a sou in her stocking. But her beauty was worth a fortune, her goodness another fortune, and the peace of her love yet another fortune; so you will understand that the treasury of France could not boast of such wealth as mine.

"Some would say that my art encouraged the routs and Bacchic feasts of the famous Regency period. Of course, all who lived in that period and worked and prospered in it contributed to the reaction from the stately magnificence, the ceremonious and boring times of Louis Quatorze. Rather would I say that I, and such as I, intensified and beautified that reaction. Gaiety, charm and freedom were the orders of the day throughout a France where even the poorest were light of heart. I and my kind had to develop a cult. The way was clear for our labours and the cult early defined. That cult was the worship of Venus, the world of the epicure and a harking back to the delightful tales of mythology.

"Watteau had shone, as no man before him, in the amazing detail and accuracy of his garden-scenes and *bals champêtres*; which to me were reminiscent of Italian comedy. I preferred to go back to Greece and Rome, and my returning footsteps brought manifold delights in my Venuses, Cupids, Junos, Hebes, and the undying classical groupings of other gods and goddesses and Olympian events.

"I lived in an exquisite world—a world of eternal sunshine, where poets ever sang their sweetest songs and the tragedies of life were tamed down to little more than whispers and backgrounds, for their greater contrast with love and beauty. I dipped my brush in the native blue of sun-washed skies—the blue of halycon realms. I searched the cool tints of dawn and the rising warmth of day for the hues of bodily perfections; the roseate hues of lovely limbs and the opalescence of exquisitely contoured breasts.

"The world of fashionable Paris was at my feet; for the paintings of my world gave them their world sublimated, as it were. They could search and find their own emotions of gallantry portrayed before them. In my visions they saw their own illusions of love and dalliance. Then I painted that subtlety—that elusive quality which we call 'femininity', with all its allure, its fragrance and its charm, as 'nature-painters' seek to paint the frailty of flowers.

"They said that Cupids flew into my studio as they had been turtle-doves, billing and cooing and playing hide-and-seek amongst the clouds . . . how could I keep the little rascals off my canvases? I painted the Dance of Life; which, in my time and as I saw it, was no devil's dance, but an eternal dance of delight and of the radiant mysteries of love.

"Messieurs, I am come to this gathering because here, in this old house of the hardy and uncouth English, I know a fine pair of my paintings have their

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

home. Further: that home is the home of a Frenchman; and who shall love my work if not a fellow-countryman who waits patiently for many years before he can come to ownership of a pair of my pictures?

"Well, he has had his reward; for they are of my best works those paintings. *Love Enchained by the Graces* and *Hymen and Love*. In the first painting the gracious Pompadour is one of the Graces and my beautiful wife was model for another. The Pompadour is again the central figure in the second painting. Both paintings were intended to adorn the *salon* of the Marquise. In them I have sought to convey a pattern of beauty and to fix forever those two 'Graces' of my life—my dear wife and, of course, the incomparable Marquise de Pompadour.

"I have listened with much appreciation to certain artists here, centuries earlier than myself, whose fine work I had studied in my apprenticeship. They have all stressed that hard work is vital to success. They are right, Messieurs: hard work is a comprehensive term. With hard work go determination, concentration and practice, practice and still more practice. The very air of the days in which I lived was surcharged with suppressed energy, which impelled a sensitive man to live at the very height of his powers. For us, life seemed a veritable race with death. Not that we ever thought much about that grisly skeleton in our cupboards; but we knew the limits of life, and as we did not know the limitations of production we strove ever to increase our individual output and cram into to-day what in other periods would probably have taken several to-morrows.

"Life in Paris was just one long, sustained bout of fever, which became hectic as one matured in years. Later, I realised that most of us had over-run our motive powers; and if you ask me how I got through my labours I will tell you, frankly, it seemed to me that every day I achieved the impossible. I painted many large canvases for the King and the Pompadour and accepted hundreds of commissions both for public and private interests; made innumerable designs for tapestries, engravings and etchings, drawings for cabinet-makers and decorations in palaces and private houses.

"Messieurs, it is possible for a man to love woman with every fibre of his being and yet to be free from desire. There was a goddess to whom I looked up. She—this goddess that walked on earth—was just different from other women. She could be the critical and yet graciously sincere friend of a man and remain on her pedestal unapproached and unapproachable in the matter of physical love, neither desiring nor seeking to be desired. The reason was, of course, that in spite of her wondrous endowment of femininity, which she could employ disastrously if need be, she was, shall I say, nine-tenths brain, and her lovely body was but the vessel of a vast ambition, a vast loyalty and a vaster love for France! Messieurs, I speak of Madame de Pompadour!

"The rise of this paragon among women from obscurity, as Mademoiselle Jeanne Poisson, to the estate of Madame Lenormant d'Etoiles (the *entrée* to whose *salon* rapidly became the ambition of all artists) and, finally, to that of the Marquise de Pompadour, the honoured and acknowledged mistress of the King, is in itself a chapter of French history. Not only artists, but the great and

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

noble of Paris, came to frequent the *salon* of Madame including the all-powerful Cardinal Fleury, who for sixteen years governed the King and the State, and, if I may couple a humble name with so great a personage, François Boucher. I fell at once beneath her spell!

"Ah, Messieurs, you could not deceive the clear brain of that woman! She knew almost at a glance those who loved her and those who hated; and the latter soon came to add another emotion to hatred and jealousy, and that was fear. Her wrath was terrible—the more terrible because it was ruthless and worked beneath the veneer of indifference. *Ma foi!* but she dealt with them and, high or low, down they came! It was like watching a hundred dramas, which could, if the victim fought back, quickly develop into tragedy. But when and where she loved she had no stint in giving, and, *mes amis*, how wisely she gave! You were bound to her by silken threads: elastic and tender, but more riveting than steel.

"Her *salon*! Never, never, on the wide earth was anything seen to challenge it! She ruled the King, the State, all France: she ruled wisely and to a purpose; for, as I have said, she loved France and her people. Deem her extravagant if you will; but remember the time in which she lived—when none but a genius could remain, as the English say, firm in the saddle. There were so many waiting for the least weakness in order to exploit it mercilessly and fling the favourite back—as the Englishman would say—to hell. The courtiers, statesmen, soldiers of all countries, and the world's most distinguished people in art and commerce, thronged to la Pompadour; which, I need hardly say, gave to France a vast importance in the spheres of politics and economy. It was no mere omen that her advent to power coincided with success in our arms and a rise in national prosperity. For these and similar ends she entertained the world with balls, suppers, theatricals and every kind of magnificent display, and increased her power till her name rang throughout the Courts of Europe. One must weigh one thing against another in this practical world. To those who would point to her extravagance, to the seventy-odd millions which Madame 'extorted' from Louis Quinze for her 'pleasures'—I would say 'Cast up the other side of the ledger'.

"Did not the haughty Maria Theresa call her, and call her with real affection, 'my cousin'? Did not Louis' Queen and the royal princesses receive her—to be charmed by the respect of this greatest woman and range themselves on her side against the narrow-minded Dauphin and such dogs as the vilifying Maurepas? None but the woman destined to rule France in actuality, although but one of a succession of the King's mistresses, could have won and built up that prestige which was her lot.

"Well, well; tell me I am prejudiced, and say I was in love with her. I was, of course; but I shared my love with every red-blooded man in France—with every Frenchman, except the Jesuits. Why, Messieurs, this incomparable, brilliant creature in the course of events won the sincere respect and comradeship of her one-time implacable foe, the Duc de Choiseul! That, I may tell you, was more than a triumph.

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

"Those of you, Messieurs, who have studied my paintings will know that the Pompadour was magnificent in figure, verily a fitting mate for a king. She was tall and of that slenderness which conceals sufficiency of contour to enchain beauty as in a cage of the fairest flesh. Her skin and her complexion were the despair of artists. If her features were not every one of perfection it did not matter, for her eyes made you forget to exercise your critical faculties. She possessed, too, a gift which enhanced her beauty, a gift more subtle than the charm of the most perfect regularity of feature. This gift was the enthusiasm which transformed her in the presence of those whom she loved: it was as if a light had been kindled; and I do assure you, *mes amis*, it put out all other lights as the moon puts out the stars when she is come to the full glory of her reign as queen of heaven.

"She—that indefinable, incomparable she—reigned supreme for sixteen years as the uncrowned queen of France. Champions of the Arts in all their forms bowed before her and laid ceaseless tribute at her feet."

I found myself staring in some amazement at the speaker; for where I had seen a youth sparkling with health and vigour and a certain beauty, I now gazed upon an old man, whose features were working strangely, as if he strove against the unmanliness of tears. The only thing about him unchanged was his beautifully coiffured wig. His features had lengthened, particularly his nose: his skin was blanched and his eyes had grown prominent with the thinning of their brows; also, the tender mouth of adolescence had shrunk and become pinched; his hands, too, which now grasped a lorgnette, were the hands of age with the veins showing through a skin that seemed but half-opaque. Boucher, the greatest of the French painters of his time, had come to his old age and to his end! Then with a sigh and a look upwards, as if he beheld some flight of winged Loves such as he had so often lavished on his brilliant canvases, he said :

"I have little more to tell you—you, my kind friends, who have listened—" he happened to glance down at his hands; shrugged his shoulders and his kindly features lit with a smile "—you, who have listened to an old man with so much patience. I was made Chief Painter to the King and also a Director of the Academy, thus taking the place of my old friend Carl van Loo. My health was failing; but still I worked on."

"I treasure the thought that it was said of me at the end that no man was more loved than François Boucher, despite his faults. I made money easily and let it go easily. I had power and used it—to help those who could not easily help themselves. Well, well; but I had, myself also, been helped over many a stile on the long road of Life."

CHAPTER XVIII

FRAGONARD

FRAGONARD rose to his feet and Boucher led an applause which showed that he, Fragonard, had good friends amongst the company. The Abbot gave him a welcoming smile and a stately wave of the hand as the great painter bowed to him. I had expected in the vagaries of my dream that Fragonard would start his speech in the guise of a robust and manly youth, full of the fires of Provence and that glorious health which so distinguished him from the phthisis-ridden Watteau and which would account for the exuberance that revelled in so many of his canvases—a trait quite foreign to the haunting melancholy of Watteau, in which, if one look for it, is to be discerned the tragic element of despair.

Instead I looked upon an old man. Fragonard was nearly eighty years of age when he died in 1806, a saddened and, I imagine, a disappointed man; for his happy world had veritably been turned upside down in the terrors and vandalism of the Revolution. His face was that of a man of mature old age, one in whom health and strength, both of mind and body, remained. His features were impressive and well defined—a straight nose; a sensual, yet tender mouth; a chin showing determination, yet in good proportion to the noble countenance; the eyes large and liquid, but with a stern line of brows above them; and short hair of a beautiful silver that waved handsomely and which age appeared not to have thinned. His coat was that of a gentleman of the early nineteenth century; his cravat spread loosely on his chest and revered at his neck with the effect of a collar. His air was one of dignity that had survived material loss; and if his apparel were on the shabby side he was not conscious of it, or at least as indifferent as a gentleman of any period should be.

"Monsieur l'Abbé and my friends," began Fragonard, by way of salutation, "as my sojourn on earth was of some eighty years' span, I have, as some of you will know, seen much of the ups and downs of life. Of the 'downs' I will not speak; for they are contrasted with pleasant memories of better times—of life, so full of the best that human existence had to offer, that to look back is a delight. Hence I will dwell on my happier days and my art; for the two are, naturally, inseparable. In later years, as you have heard, when I was least able to cope with adversity, cloud and storm and terror invaded my beautiful France; the brutalities and coarseness of the *canaille* killed all refinement,

FRAGONARD

courtesy and faith in accepted traditions, while savage greed took the place of care-free gaiety and joyous living.

"They say of me that when I came to Paris I brought with me the hot sun of Provence. That is an exaggeration, though I admit that the sun was in my blood, and as the strain of blood so is the man. No, indeed; Paris had little need of lessons in the arts of love and gaiety from me; for in the decline of the old monarchy, with its formalism and intricate ceremony, the sunlight of the Regency burst upon the proud city with a suddenness and glare that lit up not only Paris and France but the whole of Europe. If there was another city in those my happier days which could even faintly emulate the glory of Paris, I never heard of it.

"If you are looking for warmth, sunlight, passion and the exaltation of love from every angle, where else did these choicer attributes of art burn so brightly as in Paris? Where, save in Paris, could the haunting beauty of Watteau's later works have been inspired? What other environment could have fed the sublimated visions, the poetic imagery of Boucher? Where else in the world was the true home of the artist—where else such recognition of genius; where else could the man of outstanding talent come so quickly to fame and a sufficiency of worldly wealth? Ah, Messieurs, you who have lived in calmer times, I could almost say of you in the pride and arrogance of my experience that you have not lived at all, for the golden city was the pivot and centre of the sun, and the fullness of life was thrust upon us till our senses spun in the plethora of her gifts!

"Before I tell you of myself and my work, I must render tribute to my beloved friend, François Boucher. It was he who guided me largely in my approach to Art; for all youth in art must have a guide, in one sense or another, and it is true in art that what the youth imbibes sticks, and tends to form both the character of the man and the character of his work. Who knows; but for Boucher and his amazing kindness and ceaseless encouragement and his nobility in giving a just credit to work well done, I might have come under the influence of Louis Quinze and not, as was actually the case, practically begun to feel my feet with the artistic revelations of Louis Seize. I speak of the 'nobility' of my friend Boucher; and, Gentlemen, his was the finest of all the nobilities—the attribute of a great man. He knew, for he said so often to me, that I was likely to invade his own particular field, if it were possible to bring such a phantasy within the realm of fact. Boucher knew it and would laugh and then say to me, with such high-seated generosity that I could have wept for the rich friendliness of it, that in certain directions I, Frago, was better than he. So he would, delightedly, point to some line, some tender colouring, some point of composition where I, the pupil, trod on the same plane with the master. . . . I will not have it that I was the peer of Boucher in that field which he made his own! It is as Watteau has said: Giorgione, Rubens, Watteau, each have affinities with each other, but no one is the whole of the three. Thus it is with Boucher. In his own field I could not approach him: but in my field he will tell you that he, too, is content to approve and feel pride in having first guided the wayward



THE PRODIGAL SON
by Fragonard

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

footsteps of the lusty young artist that came humbly, but with hope, to make of Art and Paris a mistress.

"It was Boucher who fed my desire to go to Rome. When you have studied the Venetians, he said, turn to the passion of Rubens, in which the phantom lust for life flows brilliantly; for it is in the light that fierce and turbulent passions run to strength. I followed that advice and extended the principle of it to such a degree that even my contemporary critics ceased the attempt to put me in a category. They could pick out the influence of Louis Quinze here and Louis Seize there, and of Italy and the Pays-Bas; eroticism and the pure and loftiest of sentiments and the subtle genius of the *paysagiste*, and still be baffled what to do with it all in the field of regimentation. Indeed, I am told by artists here who lived long after me that the difficulty for my critics still persists. These reflections, Gentlemen, give me cause to smile; for, like Watteau, who put the golden touch of refinement on everything he did, I came out of the melting-pot of observation and study just Fragonard and nobody else, living or dead. Why not? Oneself is a tried friend and, if one is not a fool, a good fellow, all said and done.

"Twice did I go to Italy; once under the patronage of that rich and noble-hearted amateur in Art, l'Abbé de Saint-Non, and again at the behest of the well-known financier of my day, Monsieur Bergeret, who was also a dilettante in the world of Art. My first visit was at the age of twenty-four. I would ask you to consider what the opportunity meant to me at that age—to visit the Eternal City, the ancient home of all the Arts, with every door open to me through the influence of a patron and friend, whose wealth brought everything a young man could desire within his avid reach.

"Hubert Robert was my comrade on my first adventure to Italy. You may remember him as a clever landscape painter. One could not wish for a more joyous and loyal friend. To him, as to me, the Abbé's glorious Villa d'Este and its range of lovely gardens was a veritable paradise, both of Nature and of the subtle hand of man. I cannot tell you of the richness of those gardens; but you will see something of it in innumerable drawings of mine in red and black chalk.

"The Abbé would watch Hubert and I at work 'immortalising' his gardens, as he would say, with his kindly smile. Then he would remind us with apt *clichés* what that comprehensive word 'garden' means to artists; *clichés* such as: 'Fragonard, my friend, Art is to Life what flowers are to a garden'. Mark you, Gentlemen, my noble friend was what might readily be called a great man. He was the Abbé de Poultièrès in the Diocèse de Langres, and the fact that I was a mere nobody—a struggling young painter with the air of a healthy rustic—made no difference to him, who was a judge of men and their potentialities. He brought us, my friend Robert and I, to the glorious Tivoli—to his beautiful villa basking in the glory of an Italian sun and the blue of Italian skies; and we owed him eternal gratitude, not only on our own behalf but, if you will pardon the conceit, on behalf of much which we were destined to accomplish in the name of Art.

"The *Villa d'Este* was no bijou *Villa Maïdama*; for its magnificence was of the

quality of a palace—a palace in everything but name. I recall its grand salons and halls, its cool corridors and loggias, while the memory of its world-famous gardens is a sheer delight. Imagine a majestic pile of white marble walls come to rest on the summit of Tivoli's hills, its porticos, balconies and windows looking out upon the far-reaching undulations of the plain below.

"Around are commanding heights, their sides studded with white villas and the remains of ancient temples, streaked here and there with cascades springing from red-brown rocks or from the luxurious greenery of Nature-made crevasses. These cascades pour their hurrying waters into the River Teverone which in due course will empty them into the on-rolling flood of the Tiber—Father Tiber, like the yellow mane of a lion plunging into the sea!

"I recall with pleasure those long summer days spent in sketching the Villa; the wide terraces, the groves of tall cypresses and spreading pines, the cascades of gleaming waters splitting the sun's light into prismic gems as they glide over the grey rocks, frothing into pools rimmed with boulders showing green with lichen or stained with the yellowish brown of iron. Often have I felt, in the breathless stillness, that such earthly beauty might at any moment bring forth the shy Naiades—phantasies born of the environment. Fauns might well people the long vistas of shady walks, the formally-patterned beds of gorgeous flowers, the cool parterres; the ranging pergolas, under the peerless sky, blue as the waters of the exquisite grotto of Capri.

"I assure you, my friends, that in the happy months which I spent at the Villa d'Este I left no spot unexplored. Of course, I had my favourites, such as the Cascatella della Rometta with its little pillared temple; the 'Hundred Fountains' with their regiments of jets falling into the long, canalised basin, and the still more marvellous Fountain of the Organ, which actually was a water-organ. I dearly loved the famous cypresses, pergolas and classic grottos. There was, too, the incomparable view from the terraces whence the eye might drink its fill, ranging over the glorious country stretching from the steep hill on which the Villa stood. I had a favourite spot at the end of the grand terrace where I could stand and gaze towards the Eternal City, looking down on the enchanting Campagna di Roma—a carpet of living green merging into the deep, elusive blue of distance. Across the plain meandered silver streams, and here and there were villages and isolated villas with the ribbons of winding roads bearing lazy traffic wending its way to Rome. There is a haunting beauty—a spirit of eternal mystery—in this vast, marshy waste, a beauty intense and gripping; the eye is held and the heart entranced.

"Beautiful as is the prospect by day, it becomes a beauty transformed when the vague enigma of night enshrouds it. Then the dusky plain is dotted with many lights, some at rest, some flickering or in movement, and above, the far-flung vault of heaven is lit with the sparkle of her starry palaces. These palaces of night, the radiant stars of the firmament, looked down many a time upon the Villa d'Este to behold three mortals, bound together in the affinity of tastes and mutual affections; and the sound of music would be on the air—Saint-Non with viol and vibrant voice singing the *chansons* of Old France.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

"Then Saint-Non made preparations for departure. I had to return to Paris; Hubert Robert went south to Naples and Herculaneum. En route for France, Saint-Non and I paused at various cities of Italy, at Rome nearby, at Florence, Genoa and other towns, and my portfolio became filled with landscapes, churches, palaces, statues and the like, many of which Saint-Non etched and used for his great work on the beauties of Italy. Aye, my friends, he was clever at his work. If you examine it and compare it with my originals you will see how intimately he has reproduced my touch and tone.

"In our leisurely adieu to Italy we spent happy days in studying her beautiful monuments. For example, the Flying Angels by Caravaggio in the church of St. Louis of France, which is our National Church in the city of the Popes. I could but stand and marvel at those frescoes and the amazing buoyancy of the floating figures. Then the Vatican and the Palazzo Chigi were eternal monuments to the genius of the great Buonarroti and thrice great Raphael, who caught the beauty of woman and child in terms of unapproachable perfection. In the Farnesina I spent long hours labouring to divine, worthily, the secret of the cupids and the marvellous head by Michelangelo; and, again, in the Chigi Palace, the beautiful group wherein young Eros is carried aloft by two Amorini. The decorations of the Farnesina produced in me not only intense admiration but a consciousness of humility; for I stood in the presence of the most beautiful of patterned art which the world has to show. Moreover, it was work after my own heart—the story of Psyche, the soul, wooed by the roguish Eros; of Mercury, the swift messenger of the gods, and other and lovely dreams of myth; the labour—I might say, the very soul—of the master, Raphael D'Urbino. To me, it was as nothing that Giulio Romano and Francesco Penni had aided in this stupendous work; for everywhere could be discerned the over-riding mind and touch of the supreme master.

"Though my enthusiasm overflowed in the presence of the highest works of Art, yet, to tell you the truth, my heart rose and went to my head many times. This healthy, material and rustic heart of mine was stirred to its depths by the achievements of many masters, and came to appreciate the inner meaning of what we loosely term 'worship'. It was so very specially when, passing through Florence, I stood before Michelangelo's truly marvellous statue *Il Penseroso* in the Medici Chapel. The concept struck awe within me. Such awe was in keeping with the brooding air and monuments of the chapel itself, where the very silence was eloquent.*

"To return to Paris was to be reminded of my earliest days in the world's faery city—the days when I did my three year's apprenticeship at the Royal School under the direction of Carl van Loo. I do confess that until, in days of maturity, I changed my front, as the critics said, I had to work the devilry and licence out of my blood, for I enjoyed giving good people shocks by my eroticisms. I loved the wayward rôle of Puck and indeed they, the knowing ones, credited me with wit and emotion behind all my little obscenities. After all, I

*27 of Fragonard's drawings are in the collection of the Author and these include "*Il Penseroso*" after Michelangelo.

FRAGONARD

was a Frenchman, native of a warm soul-stirring country, and such men love truth and in their youth do not fear to call, as the English say, a spade a spade. Those who saw most clearly into the art of a painter whose main subject was Life, said that my themes in other hands would have been frankly obscene; but in mine slipped from the reproach of such coarseness into a realm where the appeal of underlying beauty opposed the inference of carnality. If my loves and my women were less pure than the transcendent loves and tenderly spiritual women of Watteau, they were certainly less sensual than the *demi-vierges* of Greuze."

Here Boucher, rather rudely, I thought, interrupted: he, doubtless, considering his friendship with the great Fragonard warrant for any liberty. He rapped on the table with one of my Queen Anne dessert spoons and, of course, secured attention.

"Come, you rascal—you Frago; let us hear of the *panneaux* you did for Du Barry. The Progress of Love in the heart of Young Women. Ha! Ha! Our Frago among the innocents! The jests of Frago about the virgins!" Fragonard may have liked to have his leg pulled; but for the occasion he put on the frown of challenging virtue.

"And why not?" said he. "What was wrong with my *panneaux*, Monsieur Boucher—the purist amongst the Regency artists?" At this there were loud laughs. The Abbot smiled, happily; though I doubt if he had the vaguest idea of what the little sideplay was about.

"Ah, why not indeed," replied Boucher, with a most puckish grin. "I hated the Du Barry; for beside my Marie-Antoinette she was as a dandelion is to a fair white rose; but the *panneaux*—had I been spared to see their completion I should have turned green with envy."

"Yes," agreed Fragonard, seriously. "They were begun in that year of tragedy when France lost her Boucher, and were finished the following year. It was one of my major griefs that you never saw them. As my old friend here says, the subject was the stages of the development of love in the hearts of young women. I divided the idea into four stages, which I called *l'Escalade, la Poursuite, les Lettres d'amour* and *l'Amant couronné*. There was, of course, the underlying *motif*: . . . was it the glorification of the one-time passionate love of Louis Quinze for the delightful Du Barry? Aha; that, my friends, as the Englishman says, is anyone's guess. The love of a king is like loyalty and has the quality of duty. It is well within the contrary nature of women to pay lip-service to duty. It was said of this series that they constituted an epic of love—and, indeed, none was more conscious than I of their beauty. During the Revolution my panels were transported to Grasse; what became of them thereafter I know not.

"You may know the circumstances attending my painting called *The Swing* or, of course, you may not? Anyway, it happened like this. A fellow painter who perhaps had more virtue than ability was asked by a spritely financier to paint his mistress, a charming young girl, swinging through the air with a good bishop on the ropes to provide propulsion; while he, the financier, reclined beneath her at such an angle as would give him, through his lorgnette, a fascinating view of the opening and closing of her petticoats, which in their

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

frail flight through the air, would suggest the unfolding of a rose from its confining calyx. Aha, you see; the spritely financier was something of a poet in his *flair* for the erotic. But my fellow-artist could not enter into his feelings and with horror refused the commission. Perhaps enlisting the offices of a bishop was too much for him. Then the spritely man of finance came to me and—*l'escarpolette* became history and brought me many commissions. The subject, you will say, is naughty—eh? Well, well; it gave me a glorious opportunity to display my profound knowledge of arboreal surroundings!

"I could not claim to be a specialist in landscape; but nevertheless I did a lot of work in this *genre*. They spoke well of my *Fête de Saint-Cloyd*, in which I made a speciality of the amazing beauty of the trees of the royal park in the Ile de France. I was ever seeking to catch effects, which interested me much more than to mark out a particular view and convey it to canvas. If you would know my work—my life's work, judge me not by my paintings alone, but judge the whole, in which at least a half is made up of my drawings. In certain respects, perhaps, a drawing is superior to a painting; that is to say, from the point of view of the artist, for whom to catch the fleeting moment of his inspiration is difficult: the vision that is seen in a flash and the effect of which on the brain endures only for a few moments is lost sooner, far sooner, when the medium is canvas instead of the sketch-book.

"None can say of me that I was a dreamer, or a poet, in the sense of music and moral. I held no lesson for the cold, if higher, world of intellect; I gave no cause for meditation on matters of the spirit; and the delicate elusiveness of Watteau was not within my range either of thought or execution. The tide of Life ran full and strong in my veins and from my blood the rich sun of Provence distilled that essence which is of the sun itself. Thus life sings many strains and forges many harmonies in my work; and death, either as a concept of existence or as an abstraction—a symbol or a purpose—was in my opinion, of all things, most alien to the artist and to Art.

"As time drew on, my front, as they said, changed; from the caprices of love and its phantasies my years led me slowly to greater seriousness of expression: though the theme might still run on the lines of passion, *The Invocation to Love* and *The Fountain of Love* are proof of this metamorphosis of the mind which imprints itself not only on the painting of a picture but on its composition. Would you say that the same hand painted that *Fountain* as had painted *The Swing*? And would you say this same hand painted *Le retour de l'Enfant prodigue*, which I saw hanging here on the wall of the entrance hall? I could not, in moments of reflection, believe it myself; but of the three the last to me is infinitely beautiful, for the theme is pure and classical and, surely, I may claim for this painting that poetry of conception which others have sought exclusively and come by over many years of concentrated labour. I came to it when well over fifty years of age, and after painting a long, long line of vastly different themes—yet even in this classic I found the note of joy! It is the sun, my friends, the rich sun of Provence! The man, after all, is but the medium—the instrument. It is the *milieu* which tells and it is the *milieu* which, in the end, returns to us.

CHAPTER XIX

CLODION

IT was about this time, if it was still possible to measure the passing moments, that someone whispered the magic name of Clodion. Boucher looked up from the reverie into which he had fallen since Fragonard had ended so abruptly.

"Ah, but of course, Monsieur Clodion of the Terra-cottas," he said gratefully. "How is it possible that you have managed to conceal yourself? Come forward, I beseech you."

The famous Clodion whom I saw come forward appeared to be an old man, and one more than merely old. His deportment seemed to be that of one desiring to creep into old age as a refuge from the troublesome events in life. Immediately, one could not forbear comparing the spectacle which he presented to his exquisite goddess-maid of the terra-cotta. The contrast between her vivid and desirable youth and his senile deliberation was nothing short of tragedy. An old song echoed strangely in my mind, the words of which went somewhat after this fashion:

"None but himself deceiving, old age seeks
Pleasure in the pavilions of the young."

This hesitant ghost of Clodion, persuading his reluctant limbs to move, came and bowed before the Abbot; and, in that moment, the incarnate spirit of youth shook his head in sympathy with the divine Flora. But when Clodion spoke his voice was strangely free from the restraint of his declining years.

"I do not feel that any apology for being a sculptor is necessary," he began in a quiet voice, "for though my work must be considered quite apart from the work of other artists present, no one here will deny that all art claims descent from the common parenthood of necessity and inspiration. In order to learn something about the rudiments of sculpture, itself, it is necessary to return to what is called the mythological period—to the Greeks, who were wise enough to observe that love is at the beginning of everything. One of their most charming fables tells of a potter who had a daughter married to a young soldier. One night when the young wife roused herself and looked tenderly at the husband who was sleeping by her side, she was overcome by a great sorrow as she remembered that the next day was a day of separation, for orders had come to the young man instructing him to rejoin his regiment. Daylight brought a curious consolation to that amorous wife. She saw, to her great astonishment,

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

that the profile of her husband's features were outlined by their shadow on the wall. She leapt out of bed and, finding a piece of chalk, she traced the line of the features, carefully, so that she should be able to retain a visible memory of that beloved face during the weary days of absence which were bound to follow. In the morning the girl's father, seeing the portrait on the wall, took some clay and, filling in the contours, produced for the first time a work of art in the relief. It is by following those natural laws of necessity and inspiration that a man may perfect himself in the science of his craft.

"When I made my figures, and especially my Flora, beautiful in her simplicity—I am going to show her to you in a moment—I did not forget the natural origin of Greek sculpture which was destined to become divine; I did not forget that the wise men among the same great people used to say: '*Beauty is most acceptable to the Gods. Ugliness is blasphemy*,' which, I suppose, explains the perpetual struggle between two extremes. I did not forget the law of one of their cities which forbade the sculptured friezes in the public buildings to be concerned with any idea but that of beauty; I did not forget their great sculptors such as Phidias who was entrusted with the mighty task of building the Temple of Athena and the Acropolis; indeed I tried always to bear in mind the precepts of this god-like master who showed that nothing worthy could be fashioned by the hand of man unless it was created, also, in the image of the beautiful!"

Clodion, in his sudden vehemence, appeared to have forgotten his audience, until his glance, wandering vaguely over the company, recalled his mind to the assembled guests. Instantly, his manner changed, his shoulders drooped apologetically, and when he ventured to speak again, his voice took another tone.

"There is only one thing lovelier than a garden, and that is the maid whom one loves"—that is what he said, as if he wished to assume another personality by saying something quite different. "I can close my eyes now and see the garden: would I could close my eyes and see the maid. Her effigy is there"—Clodion turned, eagerly, from the fire, and moved across the room to the pedestal of Flora-of-the-terra-cotta and lifted the little goddess in reverent, if somewhat unsteady hands. Then he turned and faced the company, who were regarding him with attention mingled with a faint suggestion of pity; for his story was known to some of his contemporaries. "The garden I see in my mind's eye," he continued, "is a pleasant place of flowing streams and flower-encircled statues. It contains in one place an archway through which one may step and tread a narrow causeway above the waters. Hence, it is possible to look through a circular embrasure like the frame of a Chinese moon-gate, and rest the eyes upon a picture of the winding stream, its banks clothed with the undulating verdure of trees of many shades of green. Here is a nymph-inhabited landscape of wooded lands and pastures beneath a vast expanse of sky.

"Turning from this place, one finds a little building, formerly a chapel, hard by the running waters; the ancient oaken door of which bears an inscription carved in stone above the lintel. It reads: 'All that is nobly beautiful, or true, is simple; simple as a stream'. Yet beautiful as the garden is, it is of itself but as a



THE "FLORA" OF CLODION
Statuette in Terracotta

CLODION

richly-wrought setting without a jewel. The presence of the Goddess of Flowers is needed to complete the perfect ornament. But here at last was the jewel, the gem of gems which came into that garden."

Clodion held up his terra-cotta statuette to the light, so that he had to raise his eyes to the faintly derisive smile on the lovely face. He sighed, and replaced the gentle goddess on her pedestal.

"It was not by mere chance," he said, "that I chose for this dearest of all statuettes the title, '*Flora debout*'; for, Gentlemen, I have a tale to tell of much unsatisfied love and disillusionment, of happiness and dejection, of ecstasy and despair, such as only the sensitive heart could experience and yet retain its faith. I would remind you that my little goddess is the work of an emotionally matured man. When I created it, I, Claude Michel, called Clodion, was already celebrated, well-to-do and forty-three years of age.

"At about that time, although I was busy with many commissions, a demand had grown for my pretty little terra-cotta statuettes, which had become very popular with noble patrons of both sexes. For instance, they were in great request for *Le petit Trianon*. One day, designing to embody my ideas of Spring, Youth, and Beauty in a pleasing form, I persuaded the young daughter of my friend Pajou, the sculptor, to sit for me as the model for Flora. Catherine Flora Pajou was beautiful, and only sixteen years of age. She came to my studio willingly, and sat for me; inspiring me as no other model had ever done. Before long, I, a man of experience and advanced in years, had fallen hopelessly in love with this young and simple maid, in her innocence little more than a child.

"It has been said that Flora's parents were in poor circumstances and that she consented, in marrying me, to a loveless match. I would prefer to say that, being so young, she was infatuated, swept off her feet by the flattering attentions of a man of the world. That is, however, but a poor solace for my pride; for it has to be admitted that our marriage was a mistake. In the circle of the Seasons, Spring and Autumn are wisely separated by the other quadrants and must for ever remain separate.

"Alas, her life with me could hardly have been more tragic than it was, despite the deep-rooted love which I bore her. Life has many dangers for that perfect union built on happiness, but those dangers multiply and grow hideous when love is one-sided, ill-nourished and daily more forlorn! After thirteen years of married life, my Flora demanded and obtained a release from me on the plea of 'incompatibility of temperament and character'.

"Yet, in the early days of our marriage there had seemed no cloud in our happy skies! Let me say at once that in those days the disparity in our years did not reveal itself: it simply did not exist. Mutual passion of the flesh; a continuous delight in the environment of art; and the pride of position, for, but for me, she might have had so little, were powerful arguments in her youthful mind to induce her to give me what most I desired, her delicious and unrestrained devotion; food and drink to a hungry man, even if it be but bitter bread on the surface of deep waters. Then, like most women to whom life has

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

meant endless economies, she felt that I stood for the security of the future as well as for the excitement of the present; for those luxuries of pretty clothes, jewellery, beautiful flowers and all things dear to the heart of woman. Certainly she came to me sweet and innocent; desiring as she was desired, and with the purpose of enduring faithfulness.

"Was it the folly of advancing years that impelled me to add material gift on gift to my rare love and its devotion? If so, there never was a greater folly. It was, in essence, the expression of all my underlying fears which, even in our moments of mutual joy, spread like a miasma through the gardens of my paradise! It was a tacit admission that my declining manhood, the one thing which has the power to keep the flame of fleshly love burning strongly on Love's altar, dared not stand alone. It had to be fortified by blinding the eyes of radiant young womanhood. She had to be enchanted continually by those things which are not of Love's essence. My battle was a ceaseless war against comparison; the distraction of her eyes from other and younger men by a parade of my virtues and my honours. My possessive love was fool enough to think that it could buy its way into her favours.

"Fool; fool and a thousand times a fool! Any course would have been better than the course I took. She sensed my fears, and in sensing them knew that she could cast off the shackles I would place on her tender limbs with but a shrug of her lovely body.

"Her lively imagination very soon outstripped the capacities of all my pockets, and then, with my extinguished Alladin's Lamp spurned, what could I earn save the wages of her contempt; or that merciless pity of youth for advancing years, the burden of which is an indifference imposing unfathomable depths of humiliation on him who is pitied. The whole world may honour and respect a man; but there is one, a woman, who knows him, and looks with a cold and calculating eye upon his revealed imperfection. She alone has the power—but would she be a woman if she could forgo the temptation to use her power to belittle and hurt where everyone but she has venerated and honoured!

"Before the dissolution of my marriage we had drifted wide apart over the course of years. There was no formula by which the problem of my love could be adjusted. Disillusionment came to both of us in tears and quarrels, and fresh quarrels, and the patching-up of injuries bestowed when the heart hardens itself against the withheld reproach. It seems strange that a beautiful young woman like my Flora should seek relief from one who loved her with such devotion. Release from bondage with an ogre of wickedness I could understand; but to run from a whole world of love and tenderness, and eternal sacrifices for her!

"It has been said that a poet, musician, or artist does his best work when he labours under sorrow. That may or may not be so; but I do know that he does his best work under the satisfaction of a reciprocated passion. Therefore consider heedfully this little statue because it is associated with the most exalted period of my life, its happiest moments flowering under the delights of an innocent affection. It speaks to me of love; it speaks to me of Flora, the young wife who came to me so joyously.

CLODION

"Because her name was Flora, was it not natural and appropriate that I should have conceived of her as the Goddess of Flowers, grasping in her left hand a garland of Spring blossoms, and resting her right hand upon the classic vase, a well-known symbol of abundant Life. She was a young, seductive girl in the first flush of radiant womanhood; and as such I modelled her with the enthusiasm and passion of a man thrilled by every line of her exquisite body!

"We parted, I and this child-wife of mine, twenty-six years my junior! Little did I think when I made that terra-cotta of my unhallowed future, of the lonely end to all my hopes. Alas! I could not hold the beauty I so intensely worshipped. But what perhaps I have been able to achieve, is to have caught a fragment of that beauty and to have imprisoned it forever in this red earth; as a lover, this is my eternal consolation.

"Flora vanished; we parted. Never again did I pour my soul into my labour. Some part of me had dried up; the brook of my spirit, once dancing and singing, was itself engulfed by stronger and more bitter floods. Men said afterwards that in my larger works the virility of my little ones was lost. They may be right; but when the fire dies down, and there is no further kindling of it, who shall accuse the flame because the cold and damp triumph within the house; for the soul of the house is gone, and grey ashes are a testimony thereof on an empty hearth!

"One day, much later, she came to visit me and in her eyes there were tears. . . . Of regret? Maybe. But I told her she was forgiven. For there never was in the depths of my heart a fire which a single tear could not extinguish."

CHAPTER XX
CARL FABERGÉ

WHEN Clodion had finished his story I observed that the Abbot was strolling towards a side-table whereon stood the seated figure of the Confucius, which I have mentioned already as a wonderful piece of ingenuity in a delightful shade of light green jade. This figure of Confucius could move his head, stick out his bright red tongue and roll his eyes, which were glowing jewels. The esoteric wisdom conveyed in the commonplace gesture of this figure's wagging head is something which it is impossible to describe, but which nevertheless is apparent to all who look carefully upon it. The Abbot stared down at the little figure and shook his head from side to side, much as the little Confucius was doing; then, realising that his own head-wagging was, as it were, a reflex, he laughed outright—at himself, which is, of course, the sign of a good man. He turned to Carl Fabergé, who had cleared his throat:

"Do you know, my friend, that this little figure is very, very curious indeed. I do not mean only in the exquisite work of its mechanism and the figure itself; but—it is as if something had been built into it. See—the expression on the little man's face is baffling. He puts out his tongue, rolls his bright eyes and shakes his head in an eternal negative . . . thus he mocks us, intrigues us with the quizzing of sly glances and, at the same time, answers all the world's questionings with the eternal negative of a god."

"But my lord," Fabergé hastened to assure him, "a touch of the human finger and his negative shake is changed to an affirmative nod."

"I see," said the Abbot as the little figure on being touched began to nod. "That is to say, that this god and perhaps all the other gods must wait upon the will of our kind? You would call that setting the cart in front of the horse; which is an unnatural state for the horse. Yet, may be, this is a paradox. May be, 'tis given to us alone to transcend our state by some assumption of godhead? Who shall say. This little, wise man—see, he shakes his head again—he looks as if he knew all. Who is he? Some heathen god——?"

"Nay, my lord Abbot," quoth Carl Fabergé, the pedagogue, "'tis Confucius——"

"And who is, or was, Confucius?" enquired the Abbot ingenuously. Carl Fabergé stared—wondering that a learned man should ask such a question. My lord Abbot noted the stare and continued, gently: "Be not surprised my friend at the apparent ignorance of any man when he asks a question in good

CARL FABERGÉ

faith. Remember that I am a simple Norman churchman of the eleventh century, and of a world greatly smaller than the world to which you were born——”

“The nineteenth century, my lord,” interjected Fabergé.

“There you are—the nineteenth century! Of course, any schoolboy of your time will know of this Confucius who, for me, is—nothing. Tell me of him and of your beautiful work, I pray.”

“I was forgetting, my lord Abbot,” quoth Fabergé, with some humility, for there was a bland superiority in the frank admission of the Abbot which took the wind out of the sails of the pedantic Russian, “I was forgetting that the East had not been opened up—we had to wait for Marco Polo to tell us of the wonders of China and India——”

“Yes, yes, my good friend; but where does this Confucius come in? Was he a Frenchman, or a German——?”

“No, my lord Abbot,” Fabergé hastened to assure him. “The great and eternal Confucius was not of Europe. He was a renowned Chinese philosopher. He lived about the fifth century before the coming of the Christ——”

“Ah, so long ago? Well, well; was he not then a god, as Jupiter, Saturn and others of mythology?”

“No, my lord. He was something greater—so great a lover of peace and kindness and the uplifting of the soul into the realm of gentlest wisdom that his words alone held the vast kingdom of China together for thousands of years, despite wars and the subjugation of peoples and the cruelties of tyrants—victorious to-day, but to-morrow where shall you find them! They are gone like the dust which slowly settles to cover and blot them out. Like that dust is the gentle philosophy of Confucius: it stoppeth forever the mouths of pride, ignorance and discontent in a world designed for peace and harmony. The heroes and the gods and the wise men come and are gone. Confucius remains. Look, my lord; Confucius, who did shake his gentle head, hath heard my words. See—he nods.” Fabergé waved a large hand triumphantly at the little figure. Then he turned to the company, most of whom were nodding in agreement, but also it seemed in a measure of reflex action due to some mesmeric quality in the pose and action of the little figure. It was as Fabergé said: his Confucius had, in some mysterious fashion, taken it upon himself to change his negative to an affirmative. As a symbol of the latent intent of human kind, Confucius is the world’s optimist.

The Abbot sat down on a high-backed chair adjacent to the Confucius, and seemed as if he would divide his attention between the nodding figure and the prosperous looking Fabergé, who seemed about to launch himself on the seas of reminiscence. There were few men, craftsmen or notables, in any of the arts who had a more international reputation than this same Carl Fabergé—at least, that was one of my reflections as I gazed expectantly upon this substantial man; for indeed he was substantial in body, in clothes, and deportment; and independent, too, of the stern, strongly featured face which rose above his whitish, square-cut beard. It appeared to me—I who seemed to be getting plenty of

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

practise in "sizing-up" my guests before they gave themselves away—that Carl Fabergé intended to hold the floor for a while; as doubtless he had done at many a good dinner of the guilds and crafts of the world's great cities of his time. He squared his fine shoulders and said:

"I speak of the prosperous days for merchants and traders and craftsmen in the rich courts of Europe. I was one who grew prosperous, one who feasted on fine foods which put into a man the stout and strong heart for work. He who works mightily with brain and hand and mind and muscle must eat, and eat well, if the best that is within is to come forth to the benefit of himself and of his fellow-men!" To this there was a murmur of assent; due as much to hearty agreement as to that respect which the personality of Carl Fabergé imposed.

"The rich courts of Europe in the course of time came to me—in my workshops in far-off St. Petersburg; so that I and my underworkers were kept busy day in and day out. I was, of course, designer-in-chief, director and overseer and everything that matters in the manufacture and output of all things beautiful and costly and rare created to challenge the world's critics in art!

"At home I was simply Carl Fabergé. That name, Gentlemen, was soon known throughout Holy Russia, from the humblest cot to the royal palaces; for I had quickly won the patronage of the Imperial House. You may be sure that I spared no pains to rouse and sustain the interest of the Tzar and the good Tzarina, his royal wife. In art there is no standing still—design and execution act and react one on another in a thousand changes and permutations.

"Invention is a pool of infinite possibilities to the true artist; a pool which will never run dry while the brain obeys the will in its functioning.

"Some of you, my friends, may smile when I tell you that Easter was an important date in the calendar for me and my staff, who for the feast had to give much attention to the production of Easter-eggs. But I assure you there was nothing to smile at when thousands and thousands of roubles turned on the matter. In Russia the custom of the Easter-egg was a tradition and the scope for invention and costly display infinite. The choicest enamel-work, studded with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones, served in the traditional egg-form to hide some dainty conceit—a nest of little birds bowing on their nest's edge; a model of the imperial coach; portrait miniatures of their Majesties and their children, and so on and so forth—there were fresh surprises every year. What was good for the royal family, you may be sure was good for the nobles and rich traders and money-trafficking people . . . and what was good for these gentry was—good for Carl Fabergé!

"I remember one year the royal Nicholas taking me by the arm and leading me aside in friendly mood and asking: 'Well, Fabergé; what puttest thou within my Easter-egg this year?' To which I replied, looking majesty full in the eye: 'Anything that your Majesty should command—the Kremlin itself, if such should be the royal wish'. Nicholas nodded his head and smiled: 'The Kremlin then; let it be the Kremlin, Master Fabergé, and pray God you have not overtaxed your genius'. That year His Majesty opened his Easter-egg—admittedly

CARL FABERGÉ

it was on the large side—and found within a perfect Kremlin in miniature; little knowing the labour and the trial and tribulation it had caused in my community, my group of shops.

"Most of the work done in my workshops, which grew steadily in size, was the production of bibelots of styles generally in favour with moneyed folk, fine boxes of jewelled and enamelled gold, silver or platinum; all manner of trinkets for wear and for service; carven precious stones—amethysts, emeralds, sardonyx, and the like; toilet-sets, and many other small matters too numerous to detail. At times, however, I would be commissioned for a special occasion." Fabergé left his place at the refectory table and walked over to the table whereon sat his Confucius. He picked up a square box of yellow-enamelled gold. Each corner of the box was encrusted with the black imperial eagle of old Russia, and it bore in its centre the monogram of Nicholas encircled by a fine display of Brazilian diamonds. He opened the lid and smelled the little box with an air of gratification, as if the ancient odour brought back cherished memories.

"This," he said, holding up the box and looking round upon the company—doubtless to make sure that all eyes had followed him, "this is a little bibelot, which I made especially for the Tzar and in which he used to keep recently-arrived postage stamps for sorting into his collection. The Tzar was a renowned philatelist, which art, if it can be called an art, has for many years interested royalty and bourgeoisie alike." Fabergé replaced the box and picked up a nearby case, clearly meant to hold a pocket-book, or memorandum book. "This, I, too, remember well—very well indeed. It is, as you see, an *étui* of green shagrin mounted in two-coloured golds. I can throw my mind back to the day when just before her marriage to Nicholas II the young princess Alix of Hesse came to my shop in St. Petersburg, attended by her ladies-in-waiting. She handed me a lovely miniature of her precious self, which had been painted by the famous Danish miniaturist, Zehngral, and asked me to set it in an *étui pour carnet de bal*. It was to be a present to her imperial fiancé." Fabergé held the pretty trifle up for all to see: "You will notice that on the back is the monogram, in gold, of her names: Alix-Victoria-Helena-Louise-Beatrice. It was the custom for these *étuis* to carry the words 'Souvenir d'amitié'. This *étui*—the sweet words were chosen by the bride-to-be herself—carries the words 'Souvenir d'amour'."

The Russian craftsman extended his hands and with both of them stroked the Confucius. The gesture was full of intimacy and affection as he set the little model nodding and smiling his inscrutable smile; his red tongue flickering in and out and his hands gently moving in rhythm. Fabergé smiled and glanced down at the Abbot, who nodded gravely, as with encouragement; although it was plain to see that Fabergé had more than enough of that assurance which needeth not the balm of encouragement.

"This is the story of my Confucius, and it is an instance of how one thing turns upon another and of the concentric ripples in the surface of life caused by something which in itself may have nothing to do with them. I pray you—listen!

"There was a certain duke of the British nobility who was seriously concerned

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

because some years of married life had failed to produce him an heir; which to one with great hereditary rights to pass on is a major tragedy.

"He was advised to secure a consecrated ikon from Holy Russia and set it upon his *prie-dieu* in order that the blessed trifle should be the talisman, as it were, of his prayers and most secret hopes. If this were done (he was told) his hopes would be fulfilled. One of my most trusted employees has narrated in his autobiography how I made an ikon for the duke and how a special place was prepared for it within a niche in a private room of his castle. He also records how in due time a son and heir was born and the succession secured.

"Such a marvel might come to pass in a humble home, and scarcely a ripple stir the pool of public consciousness; but with a great and powerful milord it is quite another matter, especially in days when superstition was far from having died out. I will tell you, Gentlemen, that news of this matter travelled as far as China—I supposed via the royal courts of the world, whence everything comes and whence all news flies to the far ends of the earth.

"A high-born Chinaman, of great courtesy and powerful in diplomatic and honourable circles, heard of the miracle which I was credited with having performed. He came to me with a request that I would exercise my 'magic' powers on his behalf in the same manner. I should point out that the desire of the Chinaman for children is even more exigent than it is with powerful dukes of the British aristocracy. The reason is, of course, that ancestor-worship has its centre in the coming of children, and particularly male progeny; for without a son the Chinaman passes into the 'shades' unhonoured and unworshipped.

"But what could I do for this fine Chinese gentleman, so dignified, so kind, so courteous? His faith had nothing in common with the ikons of Russia or other symbols of the Western religions. So I devoted myself to a study of the three ancient religions of the Celestial Empire; and it came to me that the glorious aphorisms of Con-Fu-Shu peculiarly marked him out for the benignancy of pity on the childless and the aridness of the fate which awaited them in the hereafter. Thus the idol I would make to help him to achieve his end would be a figure of the immortal Confucius!

"I selected a choice piece of *Fei-t'sui* jade and carved from this hard and precious stone a stately and contemplative Confucius. I made as you see, his head on pivots, his tongue and his hands to move, and for the eyes I inserted in well-proportioned eye-pits, glistening gems which I considered would give life to the whole.

"To describe such a work is perhaps a simple matter; but the making of it! . . . Ah, me; how many long hours, days, weeks, months, did I devote to the fashioning thereof! It was going to Peiping, remember; and that is the very home of such art. I was challenging the greatest masters in the world at their own game! I remember how it soothed the anxieties I felt lest I should fail in the high standard of the East, how it cheered me, to see my workmen, themselves experts in carving and suchlike work, gather round and examine the Confucius as if they should never tire of looking at him. Their plaudits were



JADE FIGURE OF CONFUCIUS
by Carl Fabergé

CARL FABERGÉ

balm to my uneasiness and doubts; for I know that to astound such critics was to gain the highest possible honour in our craft.

"Well, Gentlemen, the day came when this Confucius went to Peiping; and, strange to say, again was the possession of my work followed by the desired happening—the noble Chinaman experienced the felicity of being able to look forward to being worshipped with due ceremony by his son at the ancestral tomb. I heard that the Oriental gem-cutters did not criticise my work; but honoured it with that highly concentrated and searching scrutiny which seems to me to be beyond the power of the Western mind. My friend, the Chinaman, told me that in the East there is a saying which covers perhaps their reception of my work; it runs: *'In the presence of great works the Dragon—Jealousy—is cast out by the gentle Goddess of Emulation'*.

"Those were golden days for the expert craftsman. The great who came visiting and sight-seeing in Russia, and who of course stayed in St. Petersburg, returned again and again to my workshops; ever to examine, marvel at and frequently to buy and take away specimens of my art to the four corners of the earth. For how otherwise did my name become glorious wherever Art imposes its obligations on civilisation?

"I might here say a few words about that trusted employee of whom I have already made mention and who refers to me in his book.* He speaks of an amusing affair apropos of an old acquaintance who used to come to see me every year from his home in the Caucasus. Always did this well-meaning man bring me a present, and always and invariably the same kind of present—a large pot of caviar. For years and years in succession came my pot of caviar. Then one year, in chaffing him, I asked him if it were true that nothing was grown, or made in Astrakhan but caviar? He thought stolidly for a moment, for he was a man apparently of little humour; though it seemed he had more than I imagined. As I say, he sat in thought and then said, 'Yes; we have camels'. I laughed and forgot about the matter.

"The next year, to the day, there was a commotion outside my shop in the most fashionable quarter of St. Petersburg. I rushed out to see what all the noise was about. There stood a huge camel, and a crowd of people, and—the police! That camel and the disposing of her nearly turned my hair white! We did not have camels in fashionable St. Petersburg, I can tell you.

"The Revolution! It came and caught me, as it caught so many innocent folk, unaware and unprepared—hoping, ever hoping, as news got worse and worse, that a turn for the better would come. Alas! the mob smashed my windows; looted my showrooms and robbed me of all my articles of virtue. It was destiny working out its mysterious plan in Russia, as it had done in France. What will be the ultimate outcome of the New Era only God can know.

"Some friends and I fled secretly across the vast, snowy wastes to Helsingfors, where I managed eventually to get away to the freedom of Switzerland. Some say I died of a broken heart, and it may be so; for ambition seemed to dry up in me. I had lost all that I had striven for over many years and could not recover

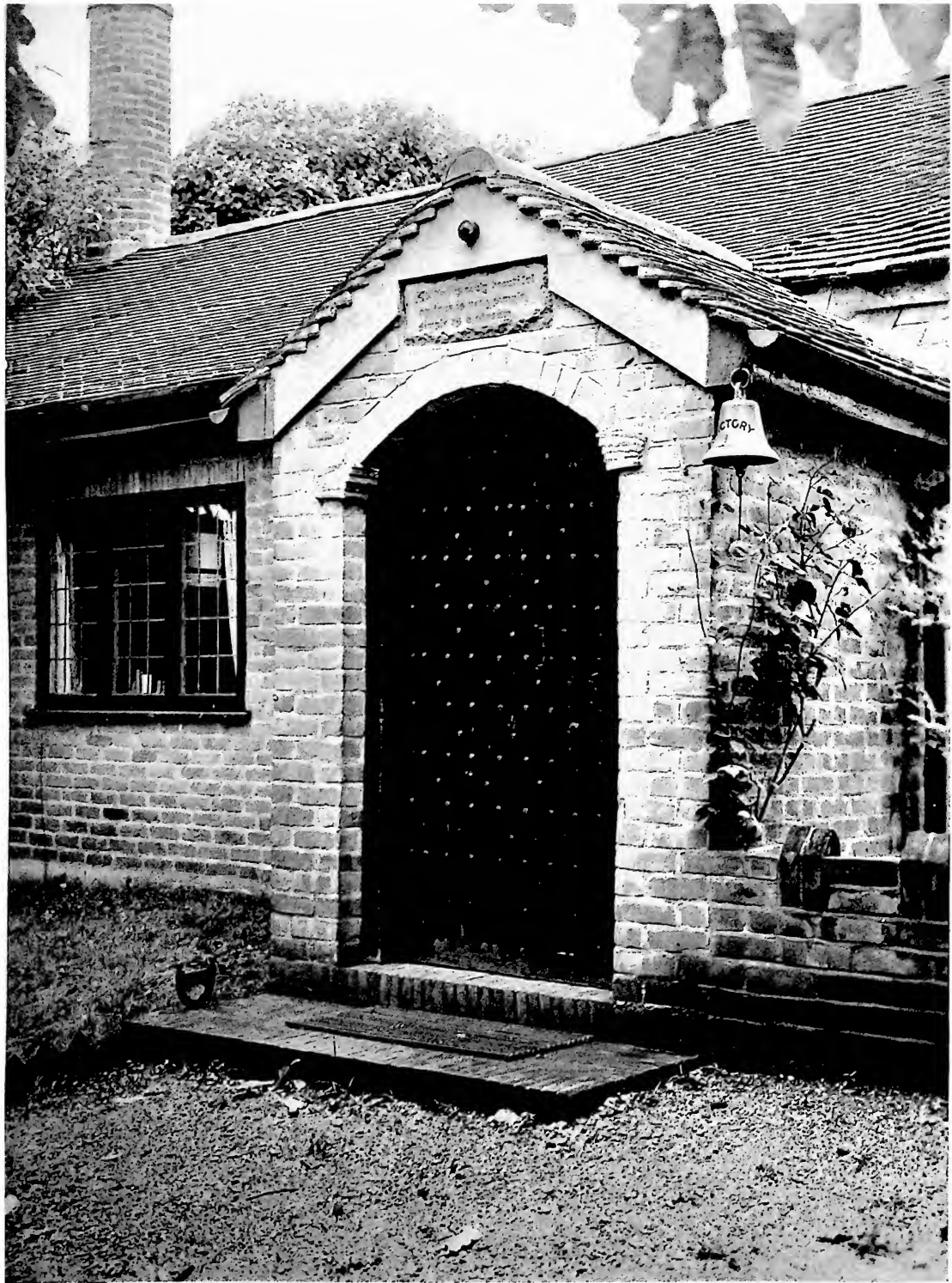
**Twice Seven*, by H. C. Bainbridge (B. T. Batsford).

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

that immaterial side of physical loss where the sense of loss is final and suggests the closing of a book which may not be re-opened.

"My cry was that of a French poet, when he said:

*"Que n'ai-je en vous perdant
Perdu le souvenir!"*



THE MEDIEVAL DOOR OF THE OLD CHAPEL AT SHENFIELD

CHAPTER XXI

FINALE

THE dramatic ending to Fabergé's account of his last days, perhaps because of the simile of the closing of a book, had the effect of putting a term to the movement of my dream. The assembly had clearly drawn to a close.

I found myself wondering in what manner my guests would take their departure, when I became aware of a great silence: a silence as a concept descending, as well as the silence bearing the pressure and perception of a breath; and not silence alone; but silence boding a great stillness. We have its counterpart on earth in the sudden drop of the wind and the shuffle of a devitalising stillness among trees, in which is expressed the tension of waiting, the phenomenon of a soundless expectancy.

Hardly could I sense the devitalised panorama, the hidden mechanism of which had ceased with such precipitation, before the immobility descended with the sudden impact of a blow. The whole prospect had frozen, for want of a better word—frozen before my wavering vision.

I waited with some curious and perhaps superstitious association of ideas for the cock to crow, heralding the dawn. His welcome strident voice would have broken that silence and disclaimed its portent, as one might hurl a delicate cylinder of glass against a wall and destroy its image for ever. But there was only silence, and the further expectancy of silence. Surely, these shadow-guests, if they remained within my dream, had heard some message, or else received a summons, or even a command. However it was, as smoothly as they had ceased, the wheels of the hidden mechanism began again to function. There came an immediate relaxation of the tension and the rustle of familiar movement, movement for no reason, perhaps, except that motivity should reassert itself, and in so doing express relief. The cessation of tension in myself was like the snapping of a retaining strand; my relief was as physical as if, in actuality, I had burst constricting bonds, and come to a great freedom from confinement.

I saw that out of all that famous company the Abbot of Noyon alone remained. Even as my vision cleared, I saw that he had risen from his chair, a stately and medieval figure. It seemed that he appeared to have gained in stature, losing much of that earthly property, the third dimension; however that may be, he now smiled and pointed to my chair, and there, to my astonishment, lay the inert figure of a man in modern dress, myself!

The Abbot spoke, addressing the essential part of me which hovered there, spiritual and contemplative: "Be you re-united with your flesh," he said

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

solemnly, and then raised his hand. "*Vade in pace*: I am with you to the *ultima Thule*. *In principio erat verbum, et Deus erat verbum*". He made the sign of the cross, with bowed head. Then was it that I heard another and mightier voice speaking: "We have been gathered together for a sanctified purpose; and the purpose is no less than the exaltation of love and human worship in an essence which is divine".

I felt an intimate pain, not only in these words but in the great valediction, a sense of loss, of heavenly bereavement. My beloved guests had vanished leaving their treasures behind them as their immortal pledge. All that my devotion could do was to go forward, impelled throughout a sphere of worship, and sustained for ever by the apocryphal knowledge of a revelation transcending all other revelations of this age, a fiery comet which had flashed in all its splendour across a firmament of truth.

The great voice had in no way diminished. "The prime intercessory," it continued, "is Beauty." And as it spake these words, it seemed to me that many eyes, eyes disframed from flesh and bone, peered from the shadows below and on high; eyes that moved and fretted and hungered; eyes of ruthlessness and of desolation, yet eyes which had known truth and happiness; and all these eyes were fixed on the Abbot, in a demand that smouldered beneath its burden of vibrant concentration and of vast desire. The deep and mighty voice resumed its parable; it now resounded with the surge and crash of commingling seas on the dark shores of consciousness; and I knew, as I would have known on earth with every fibre of my body, that the voice was the congruent voices of a million years of earthly time. It had been born in the doubt and complaint of the primitive cave-dweller, seeking to express desire in the crudest stipple and hesitant line with, perhaps, the first of the primary colours and the black and white of vegetable and earth to express the magic contour, hue and movement, so abundantly present in the world of nature. It had sounded triumphal harmonies in the mighty diapason of Greek art hundreds of years before Christ, the art slain by Socratic rationalism. It had sunk to a whisper in the lower periods of the Dark Ages. It had come, resurgent in crescendo, to a waiting world with the dawn of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century; and still it sang in the hearts of men in the midst of the tumult of twentieth-century materialism.

It was the voice which sang the Song of Beauty, the eternal aspiration to conceive, to hold and to convey the exquisite elusiveness of a changeful godhead: the unchanging refrain of human hope; rising to rebellion, especially among artists of all kinds, against those limitations which confine human endeavour within the vicious circle of human execution, even as the human body is confined to global contact with the environment of earth.

Thus it was that the Voice, as I listened, broke from its surge of sound into a still more imperious glory of words: "Tell us, O holy man of God, what is Beauty? Is it God, or of God, or is it of that nothingness from which nothing is taken and to which nothing can return?"

I could see the Abbot struggling with the inspired desire to teach, to clarify,

FINALE

as is the self-adopted mission of his kind on earth; then, the gentle light of a great humility came into his eyes; his voice was subdued, but still unhesitant:

"You ask me, a humble man of God, what is Beauty, and you demand to know the answer? I tell you that no man can know Beauty except through the perfection of God. God created Beauty in his own image."

In my amazement I stared at the self-styled humble and holy man of God; his figure had reached a great height, and his face was kindled; his eyes shone with a fervour of enduring faith. I thought of the Church Militant; of the martyr to whom the fires of the stake were less fearful than the denial of his Faith; and of the mild and gentle priests who in their thousands had given their bodies to the torturer for the salvation of the soul. I remembered: *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.*

"*Pater noster, qui es in coelis* . . ." The voice of the Abbot in prayer came to me as to one emerging from a dream within a dream. There had come a sudden termination, an interruption of sensation in the body and the mind, or in that field of receptivity which is behind the mind, and had now ceased to function. Out of the darkness I came gradually, under the influence of that guardian self which so often guides the sleeping faculties. I stirred as one aroused, and turned, or rather tried to turn, and became conscious of the limitations of a chair. I blinked; sat up, noted the sunlight and the motes playing in its beams and was vaguely conscious of something not quite as it should be. I yawned, rubbed my eyes, hoisted myself out of my chair and stretched my limbs after the manner of one well slept.

Then, the wonder of my dream returned; not as a panoramic representation of memory, but in the lightning-flash of an instantaneous revelation. I smiled; I laughed outright, but in happiness and excitement, because I knew that my dream had the richness of quality and continuity of experience—experience in such a guise that I would not have rejected it for all the riches of the Indies.

But the uneasy feeling was not far away, that although the memory of the dream remained, yet with increasing wakefulness my unreasoning joy might cease as suddenly as it came. I was afraid. I kept my gaze rigidly fixed on the sunbeam, as one both thankful for a vision and for an anchor that should link me with the physical world. In the surge of fear, I dared not, until I had conquered it, turn and look towards the end of the room. "Coward! Fool! Idiot!" I shouted into the silence of my mind, enraged at my incomprehensible loss of courage. I wrenched myself from beneath the aura of dread and swung round, seeing, as I did so, a dark familiar figure standing with its back to me in contemplation of my *Presentation* which hung on the wall at the further end of the room.

I am awake yet not awake, I thought, with beating heart; or am I dreaming still, standing firm as a rock on the solid ground of earth? I am one with the material world again; of that every sense assures me. And yet that silent figure told me something different. It stood a rigid signpost in the borderland, the spiritual no-man's-land, the neutral territory between the living and the dead.

For once in my life I was afraid, not so much of what I saw, but of what I

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

could no longer see. One thing at least was certain: as clearly and as definitely as I might examine the physical fact of my own hand was the presence of the Abbot of my dream. I tried to speak and, failing to do so, licked my dry lips, the flesh of which crept and tingled. Then speech came to me at last.

"You are here, my lord Abbot!" I stammered. He nodded.

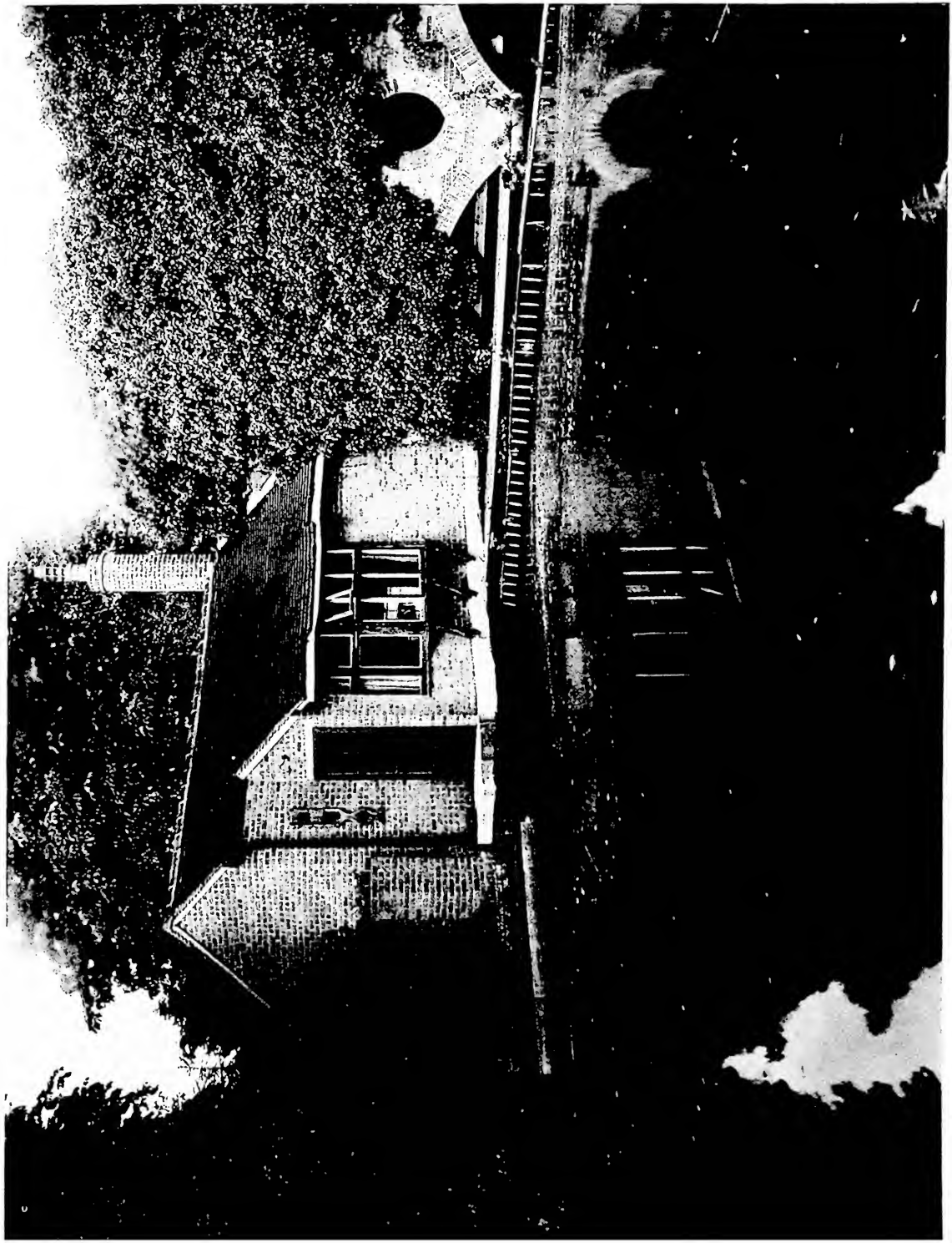
"Naturally, my son, naturally I am here. Why should I not be here? Many times have I come to this place, once my beloved home on earth." He smiled. "I have often stood at your side while you have looked with love, and thought with love, upon this most blessed soil. Here time, as I remembered it, stands still. Though desecration has been done so near the hallowed precincts of the House of God, remember this, the hand of man can never displace the presence of God. It is the same with His most Holy House; though the stones of other centuries may crush out and obscure the noble stones, that pile on pile rose in the glory of the church which I designed and built to the ever-living glory of the Lord of Hosts. And often I have stood at your side; but I have done more than that; I have also lent you my vision so that you have seen my precious edifice grow upon and glorify this later building which you call, in the mutilation of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, 'home'. You remember?"

I remembered. I remembered that many a time I had stood on the banks of the Kennet, where the lawns reach out to the upper slope on which my home now stands, and gazing on that Georgian fabric had seen it dissolve and take new shape in the spired beauty of the Abbey built by the Abbot of the Benedictines of Noyon.

"So, I come again," the Abbot said, "as often I have come through centuries of time; and I come not in curiosity, but in remembrance." His voice resounded like a trumpet-call. "We stand even now in the great nave of the abbey which I built. You see around and above us the majesty of many Roman columns. Observe the nobleness and the strength of those great arches."

I followed his gaze up into the lofty barrel-vaulted roof, followed it in my imagination, for my outward vision found it hard to penetrate the low-ceiling of a room which was no nave, but the warm roof-tree of a home. I cried out in my enthusiasm: "And we shall never recapture the glory of this mighty art until men begin to build once more with both their blood and spirit". The Abbot looked at me haughtily. He shrugged his shoulders:

"A lost art? Indeed, it is true that men have lost so many things. But now regard my transepts, to the right and left, they are English, and they were so blent with the main structure because the workmen knew their special task, and because simplicity is far better than mere ornament. What I planned and what I built delivered me from the rigour of exactitude. A little child shall lead them! This is the beauty of holiness in the testimony of wood and stone. Look upon my aisles. This," he said, with a wave of his right hand, "shows eight windows. The very hasps and plates of the lesser doors of the confessional and vestry are different on one side from the other. Thus, from diverse melodies, comes at last the perfect harmony which all men seek whether they be holy or profane."



THE SUMMER-HOUSE ON THE SITE OF THE CHAPEL;
SHOWING PART OF THE ANCIENT MILL OF SHENFIELD

FINALE

"Stone and wood," I thought, in ecstasy, "blossoming like the rose in the fable."

"My son," said the Abbot, extending a gracious hand and placing it upon my shoulder, "your living youth and your strength shall serve me. Is it not so?"

Command and grace were so blended in this kindly gesture, that I could but smile into his smile, and let him lead me on; where, I had no idea; except that his will was mine. Indeed, it was his will that impelled and directed my steps.

I followed him along the corridor, beside the stairway, and out through the door leading to the western lawn. There we caught the full brilliance of the low-angled sun topping the willows on the further bank of the Kennet.

We moved down the soft turf of the lawn to the river bank and walked along it, each with his head bowed in contemplation, until we came to the old water-mill. The Abbot paused, and his face kindled with interest as he peered closely to find weir and leat which, to me, were no more, but to him were clearly distinguishable. He touched the ruined super-structure of the Mill wheel. "This," he said, nodding and looking back at me, "is the first water-mill known to this part of the country. I built it for the service of our people, to grind the corn which flowed in from our domain. See, this mighty axle of English oak, these 'bukets' " (he used the old French word for buckets) "which swing like dotterel through the air when we in-gear the great wheel. Our Saxon churls knew nothing of transmitting movement from the water to the great stones turning within the mill-house, which could grind the yellow corn to powder."

He looked now at something which was less apparent to my eye than those parts of the mill which he had already described. But he undoubtedly described what he saw. "The mill-house," he continued, "you would say perhaps that it is over lowly? It may be that I have forgotten the stature of our Saxon millers; but however that may be," he frowned, "it is certain that nothing could be more fitting than Saxon knaves should bend to Norman labour as they had bent to Norman swords."

The despot and the conqueror echoed in those harsh words, and I could hardly restrain a smile at the thought of this conqueror being conquered in his turn by that very blood which he so obviously despised: for who to-day should set a defining line between Angles, Saxons, Normans and the Celt in this England of many and the best of bloods.

The Abbot continued to stare up at the old mill-house. Then he wandered up the little path that leads towards the mill-door. He lifted an imperious hand, and I realised with something of a shock that the old door of heavy oak had swung back of its own accord. I had followed him obediently and stood beside him, looking into the dark interior, which to me represented a tangle of rusty cogs and girders and old oak beams, scarred by the death-watch beetle, the home of spiders, bats, and maybe an owl or two. The Abbot, however, saw otherwise; for I heard him mutter to himself: "As I thought, nothing is changed. My mill! The first of its kind in this rebellious England. It shall turn again to-morrow."

I did not answer him.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

As we came out of the ancient mill-house we lingered, to stand by the mill-stream slips, to observe the majestic cascade of tumbling waters sliding over the edge of the weir, boiling in the toss and roll of agitation, before gliding into the main current of the river. I waited for my visitor to observe again that nothing here had changed. This time I could agree with him, for the waters of Shenfield have flown onwards unceasingly through century after century of English history.

As the Abbot retraced his steps, he looked for a long time to the west. I suspected he could discern a flash of the declining sunlight on the narrow Gothic windows of his abbey. What he saw in detail I could not imagine, but I could understand something of the pleasure of this scholarly man, looking again in peace and power on the product of his brain, and sweeping into his possession and content the devoted labour of love of the many men over whom he had ruled in no uncertain a manner.

We turned and walked by the side of the river until we came to the little building which had been erected on the site of the ruins, where it is likely might have stood a small chapel in the time of Domesday, possibly the same which had been mentioned later as a Proprietary Chapel, but which I preferred to think of as the Lady Chapel. This building was now called the garden-room. Part of the floor overhangs the mill-stream which flows beneath it, sometimes slipping quietly by and purling gently at the piers; but in time of rising waters, gathering volume and force under the pressure of up-river floods, its whispers changed to a song of power and purpose: at such a time, it will attack the retaining banks in a furious onslaught, and what the banks throw back is met with the angry swirl of defiant waters, impatient of restraint.

In this garden-room there was preserved a precious discovery made during excavation, when we lit upon a fifteenth-century door of oak, heavily studded with hand-wrought nails. But it was apparent that my discovery of the door had little interest for his reverend lordship. The Lady Chapel? What could the Abbot's mind recall, except perhaps the opposition and the difficulties of a master-builder?

We passed on, and my Virgilian guide, for I was but a modest attendant in our progress, paused to look back upon a noble stretch of water swirling round the bend in the strongly flowing current of the stream. Behind the foreground of waters stood a range of trees whose topmost branches lifted with a rustle and a gentle swaying movement to the evening breeze, while the rays of the sunset caused their varied greenery to dissolve in shades of gold. It might be that these trees were not the trees of the Abbot's time; indeed they could not be, and I feared to ask the holy man if the grove appeared to him in its former beauty.

As I followed in his footsteps, I told myself that in the eleventh century this woodland prospect must have been more closely wooded, and that probably much of the spacious contrast of to-day would still be lacking. But I felt in my heart that though their trees could not have been more beautiful, doubtless the monks of old had looked upon a very pleasant land with thankfulness in their hearts, and that beauty walked for them in England at that time as it still

FINALE

endures in England to-day. One thing was very sure, and that was the clerics of old knew well how to choose the right environment, whether for church, chapel, or monastery.

A little while afterwards we took the path leading to the hurrying stream, where it bends below the fall of cascading waters and slides beneath overhanging willows and alders; where the dusk gathers soonest, and the night clings more reluctantly than elsewhere; a choice spot for repose and meditation.

Close by, the river is spanned by a narrow Chinese temple-bridge, modern of course, but supported on riparian piers which must be very old, and which established proof of the spanning of the river by a bridge in earlier times in this identical spot. Indeed, this must have been so, for after waiting in curiosity to see if the Abbot would cross the bridge, and therefore tread where he had trod nearly a thousand years ago, I was not disappointed. He walked with a measured and stately tread upon my bridge and stood on the summit of its span, as if a Chinese bridge in England, even in those early Norman times, was in no way out of the ordinary.

Deep down within the heart of this autocratic Norman prelate there must have been a vein of exultation and affection. The pride of wide possession had been his, and in a fair country. Out of such a pride a noble love can grow; and out of such a love the joy of seeing what is good brings its accompaniment of thanksgiving.

The Abbot raised himself to his full height and stretched out his arms towards the river, towards the ghostly fabric of that House of God, which I could not see, and to the fair undulations of swale and forest, which I, with eyes equally appraising, had looked upon so often and for so long. His gesture was an invocation, a calling-down of the benediction; that truth and contentment and prosperity might forever rule in this, a favoured land.

The molten crimson of the setting sun seemed to me at that moment to stand still; its slanting spears of gold rested upon the ancient fields; and, in the timeless world of the Abbot, fire rose with fire to kindle crimson-tongued flame from the glory of the noble abbey-windows, and to light again the mellowing tints of the high fabric.

As I listened, a gentle sound impinged upon my fancy, making a brief echo in the air; the *angelus*! The angelus, a tolling bell of sleepy dawn, of the radiant noon-day, and of the setting sun; the earthly symbol of the Beginning and the End in the brief span of a single day of summer. I continued listening, not with the physical ear attendant upon familiar vibrations, but with some infinitely delicate mechanism which serves the spirit in a similar manner. A new volume of sound flooded over all my senses. I heard the rhythm and beat, and the interweaving of chanted harmonies, the strophe and antistrophe of men's proud voices, and the voices of boys, with the richly deeper tones of adolescents merging in praise of The Most High God; *Te Deum laudamus . . . te Deum confitemur . . . te aeternum Patrem . . . omnia terra veneratur*: We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord; Thee, the Father everlasting, all the earth doth worship.

THE BANQUET OF THE IMMORTALS

The sun seemed to me to fall suddenly in the sky. The chill of lost light was on the earth. The ghostly voices sang on, but in dying cadence; and the last words of the hymn were faint in the lifting of an air-current pressing close in the wake of darkened waters sliding beneath the bridge. *In te Domine speravi; non confundar in aeternum.* . . . In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted. Let me never be confounded. *In aeternum.* . . . Forever and forever!

Low-lying violet mists were gathering in the woods; my flesh tingled with the eeriness of the evening. I made my way towards the house. I was alone. The abbot, the last of my guests, had departed silently; but the testimony of the great resuscitation of Shenfield remained: "Forever and forever".





This First Edition of
"The Banquet of The Immortals"
printed at The Westminster Press
is limited to
10 copies on Millbourn hand-made paper
numbered 1 to 10
and 300 copies on mould-made paper
numbered 11 to 310
all copies numbered and signed by
the author

This is No.

Author's copy

Pharm

